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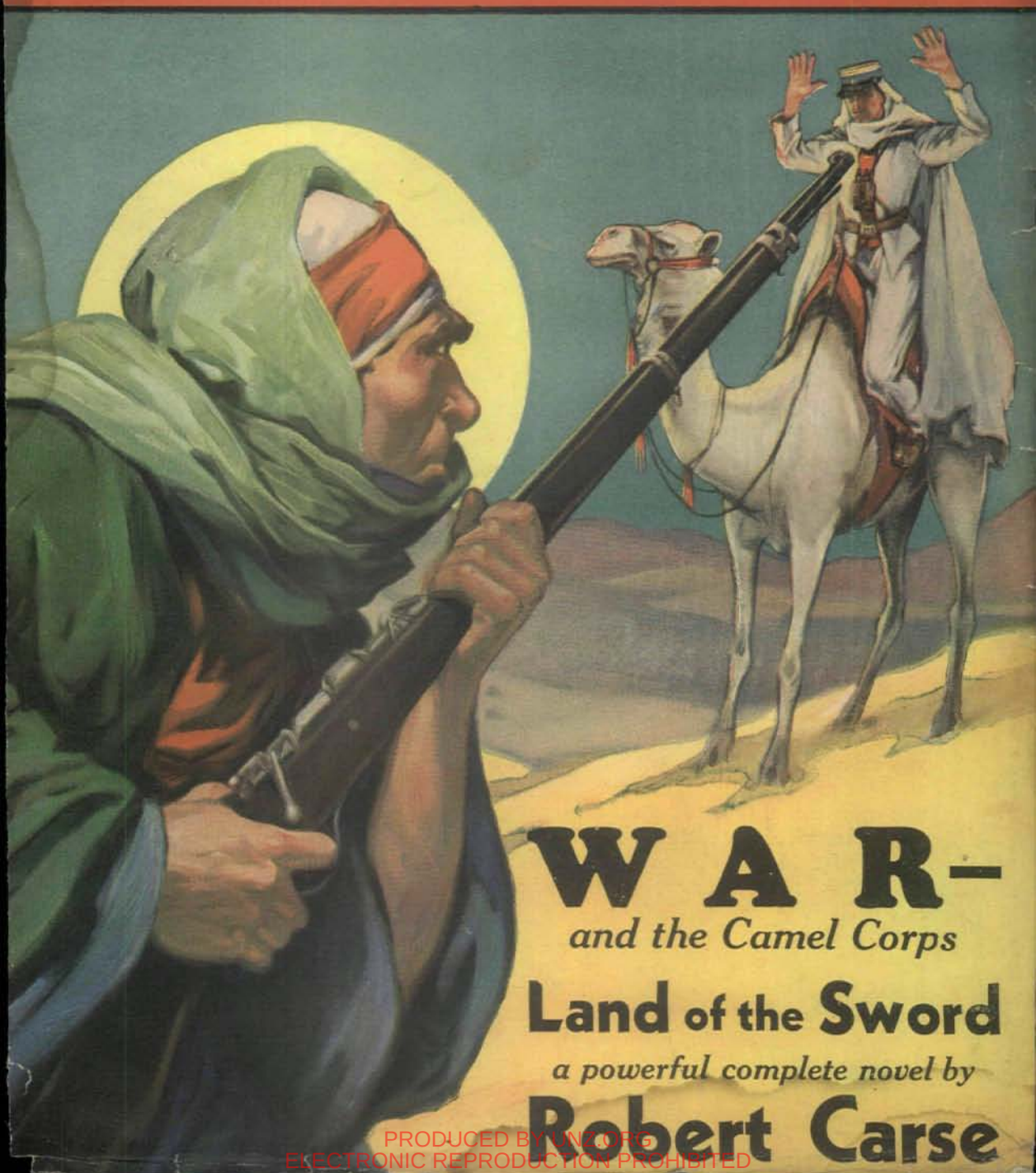

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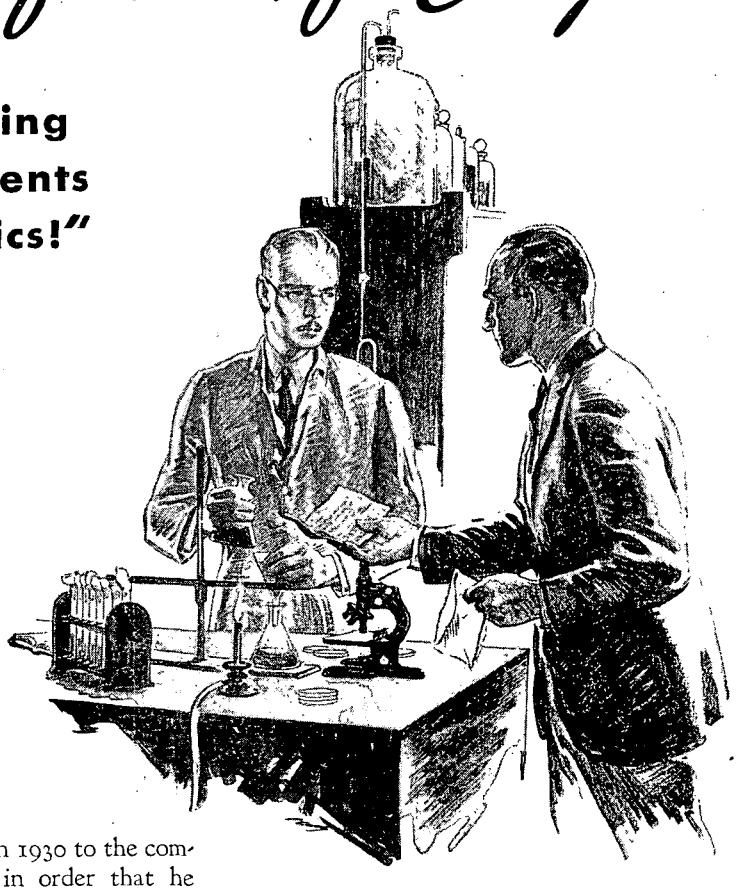

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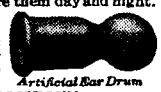

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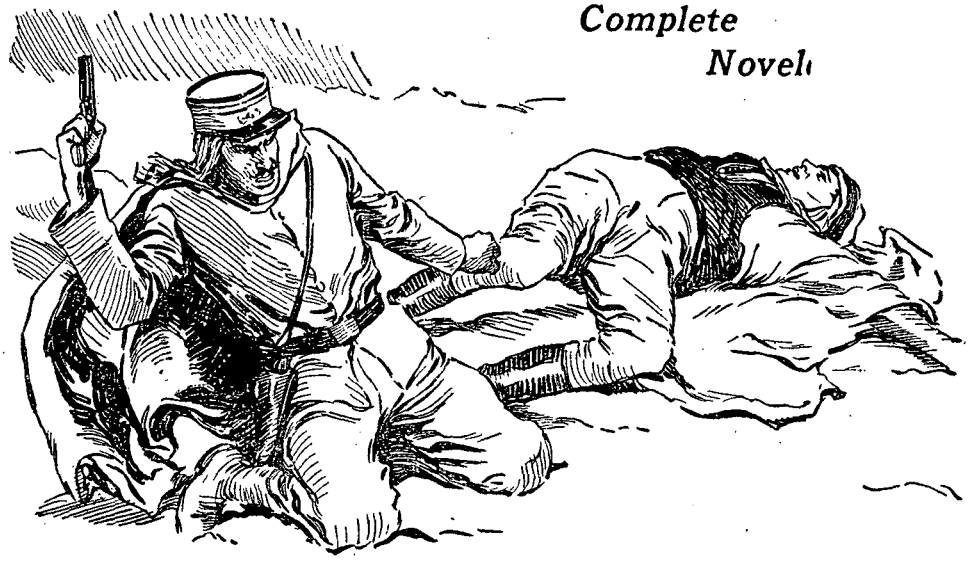

Henri staggered to his knees, tried to shoot

Land of the Sword

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "King's Ransom," "Roll and Go," etc.

Through childhood, through the War, into the heart of African intrigue two cousins carry a bitter feud

CHAPTER I.

"SISSY!"

IN contrast to the hot June sunlight of the lawn they had just left, the old stable was dark, and cool, in shadow. It was quiet there; the horses in the straw-decorated stalls in back rested comfortably and with very little sound, and only from the lawn could they hear dimly the voice of Susan Lewis, calling to them. But they did not listen to her, they had come here to get away from her, and to settle this between them, they both thought, for good.

They stood, within a foot of each other, almost knee to knee, in the one patch of sunlight in the place, a mote-flecked beam of light which dropped down upon the cracked wooden floor from the hay-loft window far above. Howard Gill Mays was the bigger in size, if a year the younger, and he had begun it, outside; he spoke before his cousin.

"All right," he said, his thirteen year old voice hoarsely strained, "you say all Frenchies aren't sissies. Yeah. And I say they are . . . Maybe," he added, his fists doubled up in front of him now, "maybe you think you're tough?"

The Count Henri Phillipe Sevran de la Goustier, although he had been for two years in an English public school, and was now in the first months of his twelfth year, wore a velvet suit with knee breeches which had ivory buttons on the sides, and a lawn collar above the jacket, the costume his mother, although born and raised in the United States, had insisted upon when he came with her to see their American relations. Now, slowly, he took the velvet jacket off, flipped it behind him up on to an empty saddle rack.

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"I said," he repeated steadily in his perfect English, "that two young boys—boys whose parents are supposed to be gentlemen, should not fight in front of a girl, in front of Susan Lewis, in particular."

"In particular," Howard Mays said after him, mocking; from the lawn, quite near by, Susan Lewis was again calling them, anxiously and stubbornly. "You and me," he said rapidly, his lips so tightly met that their edges were turned white, "we might have the same grandfather, and your mother is my mother's sister, sure—but, bah! You hear that?—bah! And, all Frenchies are sissies, meaning you, or anybody you want to mean!"

"Well," Henri de la Goustier said, and, leaning a little forward, struck at his cousin, tried to slap him in the face. Howard Mays blocked that sidewise blow with his uplifted left; with his right he hooked a clean and smacking uppercut to his cousin's jaw. "Velvet pants!" he said then. "Yeah-ah velvet pants!"

Henri de la Goustier lay sprawled upon his back on the straw-littered floor. His jaw stung and strange stars leapt before his eyes; in his brain were confused memories of his father, who had come here to this same country and this same house, and had been mocked, probably in almost the same sort of phrases, for a foreigner and a sissy, although even then he and old Howard Gill's granddaughter were already formally engaged to be married, and were to be married here, in the States.

The Baron seized Susan Lewis and rushed to the plane

Henri de la Goustier started to get to his knees, regretting in that moment that during his two school years in England he had not learned more of the gentle art of self defense according to the rules of the Marquis of Queensbury. In a sort of crude and faltering imitation of his cousin, and in memory of the English boys he had seen at school, he closed his fists up and brought his arms forward in what he thought to be a fighting posture.

Howard Mays hit him three times more before he even got in one slapping blow. He was down on his knees, almost weeping with rage at his own inability to fight like this and bleeding from the mouth and over one eye, when Susan Lewis shoved open the doors they thought they had jammed, and came in.

She brought the open sunlight with her. She stood against it, as motionless and as lovely as a statue, her long yellow hair

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caught and flamed by the sun, the sun placing a delicate and shimmering light upon her pale, clear features and the graceful lines of her pleated, frilled dress.

"ALL right," she said. "Hadn't you better stop now?" Susan Lewis had lived next door to the Gills and Howard Mays all her life; she knew him very well, and in the last month, had come to think she knew Henri de la Goustier well also. "You, Howard," she said out of the logic of her eleven years, "you look as if you've got your satisfaction out of Henri. Let him up now; let him be."

Henri de la Goustier heard that, it penetrated fully to his brain; the sting of all it meant sharp in him, he rose up again and charged his cousin once more.

"Hey, you, cut it out!" Howard Mays warned him, hitting him twice to the head and body as he said it. But his cousin was more determined, was desperate, this time. He clung to Howard Mays, and caught big handfuls of his hair, slapped and banged at his face with his open hands. Howard Mays, bellowing with rage and pain, drove him loose from him, hurled him spinning half way across the stable floor, started after him, making very mature growling sounds, intent, he said aloud, to finish it now—"I'll fix you this time, you French sissy hair-hauler!"

Henri de la Goustier crouched upon his bent knees. He was very calm now, and certain; he had just remembered the trick Nicolai, his father's one-eyed and scarred old coachman, had shown him down in Normandy one summer. Stiff-legged, swinging his fists, Howard Mays came closer, came so he stood only a brief yard away. "Get up!" he commanded. "Get up, you French sissy!"

Henri de la Goustier got up, if not completely. He raised himself far enough to let his weight fall back upon his hands, then have his hands propel him quite swiftly and violently forward, so that his feet, held closely together like a diver's, met Howard Mays squarely in the chest.

There was an oats barrel across the stable. Howard Mays landed half in that and stayed there, while both Susan Lewis and Henri de la Goustier stared at him. "You didn't," Susan Lewis said in a hollow voice, "kill him, did you?"

"*Pas encore,*" Henri de la Goustier said; "not yet. That was nothing—nothing but *la savate.* How you would say that in English, I don't know."

"I don't want to know," Susan Lewis said. "But—but get him out of the oats, will you, Henri?"

Henri de la Goustier pulled his cousin out feet first, rolled him, unceremoniously, upon the floor. He pounded him upon the back, chafed his wrists until one of Howard Mays's eyes opened, then the other, and Howard Mays gulped at him, "I'll get you—you Frenchy, you! I'll get you; just wait!"

"*A votre plaisir,*" Henri de la Goustier said, almost forgetting again his mother's tongue. "And, when you can . . . Would you like," he asked, turning his back fully to Howard Mays now and looking at Susan Lewis, "to go down to the pond and see if that big swan is back yet?"

THEY were there, he and Susan Lewis, paddling around in the swan boat, when Howard Mays came down across the lawns towards them from the rear of the immense house. He wore a clean shirt now, and the oats were out of his hair and his face was washed. "I just saw cook," he called out to them. "And she says if we don't tear her kitchen all to bits, she's got some cake."

"I don't like cake," Henri de la Goustier said in a low voice to Susan Lewis. "And, tomorrow, Mother and I are going back to France."

"I do," Susan said; "I like it fine. And it's beginning to drizzle a little bit now."

Howard Mays stood right at the foot of the little dock, waiting for them, while his cousin made the boat fast, and Susan, walking quietly, went half way along the planks, then stopped there. She held out her hand to Henri de la Goustier when he came along from making the boat fast, then called out

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to Howard Mays, and, slowly, staring, remembering what had just happened to him, he walked down to them.

"I want you to shake hands," she said. "And call it quits. After all"—she blushed a little bit, despite all the care she had taken in forming the words in her mind—"it was nothing but a silly ball bat you started scrapping over."

They stared at her, standing on either side of her, knowing, as she did, that it was she they had been fighting over, and no baseball bat at all. Then, from her they looked at each other, silently, gauging the other, remembering the blows they struck a few minutes ago, and half-forgotten things, old rumours and gossip, told them, after insistent demanding, by their mothers, or overheard from the servants here in this great old house their grandfather, Howard Gill, had built for his wife and daughters and the satisfaction of his own pride.

"Henri is going back tomorrow," Susan said to Howard Mays, partly guessing what lay in both their minds.

"Shucks," Howard Mays said. "I don't care. No kids I ever saw fight that way. Kicking . . . Why, I'll—"

Henri de la Goustier was beginning to easily move around Susan, and towards his cousin, his eyes hot and darkened with that rage which was not new.

But Susan stepped out, between him and his cousin.

"You're a pair of gumps," she said. "Just a pair of gumps—that's all. Why, Henri's been brought up in Europe, and the kids there don't fight your way, Howie. They'd probably be surprised at you."

Howard Mays shook his head and ran his bruised hands down over ribs that still ached. "Fighting's fighting," he said. "Kickin's another . . ."

"My goodness," Susan Lewis said, "you're cousins. And you won't even shake hands when it's all over."

"Yes!" Henri de la Goustier said. Lightly, he stepped past her, and held out his narrow, long hand. "Shake, Howard. I'm sorry we fought; I'm sorry I kicked you."

"I'm not." Howard Mays stood with his feet spread, his wide, bitter eyes full on his cousin's eyes. "But I'll shake hands with you . . . Come on, we get the cake—before cook eats it herself!"

THEY were finishing the last of the cake at the kitchen table when thunder clapped outside and the warm spring rain came smacking darkly down. "Come on in the library," Howard Mays said, licking the crumbs and icing off his thumb. "We can play in there until Susan's got to go home."

It was dark in the back halls and rooms of the great house, but a maid was just laying a fire in the place in the library, touched a match to it as they came in. For a moment, impressed as they had always been in this immense and high-walled room, the three of them stood there, waiting for the firelight to cast the shadows back. In that ebb and flow of light, gradually, they were able to see the portrait in its massive gilt frame above the fireplace mantel.

Briefly, once more, it fascinated them, dominating for them this whole room. It was the portrait of what all of them had learned to refer to as the "Old Man," an excellent study of Howard Gill, the man who had built this house, and, according to his own boast, "built more railroad and done more to open this country up than any other parcel of four men in it."

One of his two daughters, Howard Mays's mother, had insisted that the portrait be painted, but, after that had been accomplished, the Old Man in his turn had seen to it that it was hung here in the main room of this house which he had prided so much. "So," he had said once to his daughters a few years before his death, "those brat sons you've got can have something to look up to—when and if they get man-size . . ."

Howard Mays stood now, his hands on his hips, and laughed up at it. "I'd like to," he said, his rage eating through again and his eyes sidewise on his cousin, "have seen him see you kick me. He would have smacked you proper."

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"You're just about as silly, Howie," Susan Lewis said, "as silly can get. You don't even remember him."

"Listen!" Howard said. "You're plaguing me today. What do you know about it, anyhow, a girl like you?"

"I've lived next door to you," Susan said, smiling at him, "all my life, and my folks have, a long time before that. And my Dad worked for the Old Man, and he works for the company yet."

"You'll be trying to call yourself my cousin next, I guess," Howard said, staring obliquely at Henri de la Goustier. "But, come on; I bet I can jump over the divan higher than either of you. Or, do you want to see my Dad's sword?"

"I don't want to see any swords," Susan Lewis said. "I've seen that one before, anyhow. I think I'll go home now; the rain's stopped enough. Will you come across over to my house with me, Henri? Howie wants to play with that old sword of his Dad's."

"That's right," Howard Mays said. He was already moving across the room. "And let Henri take you home; he won't be here tomorrow, or after tomorrow, and for a long time, and I guess I can take you home all the time then—if I want."

"Don't you be so sure." Susan had stopped in the doorway to call that back. "And don't cut your bigs ears off, with that sword!"

HOWARD MAYS was before the fireplace, making parries and lashing thrusts with the gleaming, engraved, long blade of the officer's sword when his cousin got back from seeing Susan Lewis home. Henri stood in the doorway for a moment, watching, and brushing the rain drops from the velvet suit he suddenly had come to hate. When he stood in the center of the firelight, his cousin looked up at him, brandishing the sword. "My Dad was a darn fine soldier," he said. "He was a Captain in that Philippine Constabulary, and he got a medal, and killed a lot of those Moro pirates out there in a place called Mindanao, before they killed him. This is a good sword, too; I'll bet you never saw one like it."

"I've got one like it," Henri de la Goustier said, coming forward into the room. "And one better than that. It was my Father's sword. He was a senior lieutenant in the French Colonial Army, and he had a couple of medals. He and another lieutenant named Joffre were down on a river called the Senegal River, that's in West Africa. They had some black troops, only a few of them, and they got into a battle with a whole lot of the natives and beat them. My Dad was killed there, on that river; Lieutenant Joffre wrote my mother all about it."

Howard Mays had lowered the sword and was staring at him, his strong head forward in the firelight.

"Why did your Dad do that?" he said. "I thought—"

"—I know what you thought," Henri de la Goustier said. He had come over to stand right beside his cousin, and the fingers of his right hand had curved in, as though he also held a sword. "My mother has told me a little bit about that, and Nicolai—he's still our coachman, in France, but he was here with my Father and my Mother, as my Father's valet, when my Father first came to this country, when he became engaged to Mother.

"They laughed at my Father over here; they mocked him . . ."

"Say, listen," Howard Mays said, his clear-skinned face and eyes ruddy and flushed in the firelight.

But Henri de la Goustier did not seem to have heard him. It was as though, actually, he talked to the portrait of his grandfather up over the fireplace, and that the man of the portrait were alive. "These people over here called my Dad a 'French dude.' They laughed at him behind his back, because he wore patent leather shoes and a little beard, and a high hat not only on Sundays . . . Yes, they did. And you—the Old Man, there—asked him right out if he wasn't trying to marry my mother because he didn't have any money, and nothing but an old title, which he was trying to

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swap for an American fortune. My mother told me that; I know that, and don't you say a word!"

Howard Mays moved his feet in the thickness of the carpet nap, vaguely moved the sword in his hands. "I'm not saying a word," he said. "I didn't even . . ."

"Yes, you did!" Henri de la Goustier said. "You didn't, maybe—but your people did . . . And you've been thinking and saying just about the same things about me!" Swiftly, he reached out and the sword was his, in his hands, and he turned and flung it bouncing flatly across the carpet into a corner. "You think because your Grandfather there, started working with his hands, and began to make his money that way—and because he opened up all this country, shoved the frontiers back so that there weren't any frontiers here any more, that you're better than anybody else . . ."

HENRI PHILLIPE SEVRAN, COUNT DE LA GOUSTIER, was almost weeping in his rage and his emotion now. He gripped Howard Mays hard by the shoulder and held him there in front of him, motionless. "My Father," he said to the boy before him, but more, still, to the portrait on the wall, "never worked with his hands, no; and his grandfather didn't, and his grandfather's grandfather. But, our folks were the Normans, and we licked the English all over France, and we went over and we took England from the English, and we kept it, and we made ourselves kings there. We didn't go about just chasing Indians, and buffaloes, and building railroads through some cactus . . ."

"Say," Howard Mays said, his voice unnaturally deep and quiet, "those are some darn good railroads, the biggest in the world."

Henri de la Goustier blinked at him. "Yes," he said. "I guess maybe they are, or were . . . But, all that talk here, to my Dad, got him angry, even though Mother told him not to mind it, and he went back in the Army again, although he'd done his service there—and then, in about a year, he was dead."

Howard Mays turned his head, to look into the corner where his cousin had tossed the sword.

Slowly, he went and got it, brought it back, and then held it out, flatly across his extended palms. "Your Dad's sword like this one?" he said.

"Yes, a lot." Henri de la Goustier had reached out to thumb the edge of the blade.

"I guess, then," Howard Mays said, "the French Army must be a lot like our Army, hey? And your Dad must have been quite a lot like mine. Because Mother . . . and I've heard the servants, the old ones, say, too, that the Old Man was the same way with my Dad. And all the railroads were built then, and all the men who worked with Granddad, with the Old Man, were running them all right, and the Old Man told my Dad to go out and find some job, to open up something new, of his own. So Dad just joined up in the Army and went out to the Philippines, and he got killed there, like I said . . ."

Henri de la Goustier brought his eyes from the sword and from his cousin's face and again to the face of the portrait. "He must," he said slowly, "have been a really tough old chap."

"Yeah, I guess he was," Howard Mays said. "But, don't you say any more against him; you've said enough now."

"I'm not going to," Henri de la Goustier said. "But, I don't like this velvet suit myself; kids in France wear them, but not over here . . ." He paused then, watching his cousin put the sword down; in the drive, he could hear tires on the gravel, and his mother's gay voice, his aunt's. "They're coming in now," he said to Howard Mays. "Do you want to call me a sissy, once more, before they're in the house?"

"No," Howard Mays said, eyeing him, "I don't. But, tell me one thing, will you? Did you stop fighting, before, just because Susan Lewis asked you to?"

"Yes," said Henri de la Goustier calmly, slowly, "I did."

"It's a good thing, then," his cousin told

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him, "that you're going back to France again tomorrow—because, if you didn't, I'd be calling you a sissy, or anything I wanted to, and knocking the spots out of you, you and your old kicking trick and all . . ."

CHAPTER II.

FOUR YEARS AFTER.

IT was Susan Lewis, strangely, Susan grown tall and lithe and quite mature during the four years since Henri de la Goustier had seen her last, who asked him—if the old taunts and the bitter old echoes still stung. Standing not more than a foot or so away from him on the wide porch of the great old Newport house, saying softly the words she had planned for quite a time, she asked, "You're not for any real reason afraid of anything Howard might do or say, are you?"

Henri de la Goustier smiled a little bit at her. He seemed mature then, and, somehow, far older than she, and far older than his own actual years, despite the laughter which caught his eyes and his mouth below the tiny mustache he had started growing with his seventeenth birthday.

"No," he told her. For an instant he turned, as she had, to break also the intensity which had just come so amazingly and tightly between them, and stared out into the wine-shaded darkness beyond the house lights and along the lawns to the harbor, where the Casino gleamed with an almost glacial sharpness, and the yachts lay, delicate, dim and exquisite, against the twisted dappling of the shore lights on the water. "No," he said again, "I'm not afraid of anybody, Susan . . . I never have been, and I never shall be, I think. But, just why?"

"I don't know," Susan said, "except that I'm always a little bit worried over both you and Howard. Of course, you're both far more polite now than you used to be, four years ago, and you haven't fought yet, since you've been here this time. But Howard is intercollegiate boxing champion, and I read in an English magazine that you're considered the finest amateur boxer in Europe . . . I know—I know you both; you're still preparing for each other, and, in your heads, matching yourselves against each other, all because of that old quarrel four years ago, and the—things that lay behind that. But, it's so silly, and I—" She stopped, her eyes in that moment unable to withstand his glance, and what it meant.

But then, reaching out, with the edge of her fan she tapped the crumpled piece of paper he held so closely. "You're not old enough to go to war," she said. "There isn't even war yet."

"There will be!" he said. There were gaunt lines about his mouth as he said that. "Germany will be over the border and into Belgium, into France, before I can even get there . . ."

"You've been called?" she asked him. "By the government?"

FOR a moment in silence he stared at her, standing as though he actually listened to the music from behind them, the light, gay, Negro-rhythmed American music. "No," he said, trying to laugh a little at her and what he wanted to think of as only her persistence, "I'm too young to be called yet. My class wouldn't come up for service for a couple of years, I think. This"—he was putting the cablegram carefully in an inside pocket of his dinner jacket—"is from a friend of mine, a chap who went to school with me. He knows; his Dad's a cabinet minister. He just let me know."

"But, truly, you're not afraid that he—or Howard Mays—or any other man might call you a coward if you didn't go?"

"No," he said, his voice deep, and grave, truly somber now, "we've always gone . . ."

Susan Lewis could feel a trembling going through her body, and tears she did not quite understand coming hotly up against her eyelids. She swung away, and even he, beside her, thought that for a moment she was doing nothing but stare again at the

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Newport summer night. "But how about your Mother?" she asked then. "Does she know? Would she let you go, if she knew?"

"No," Henri de la Goustier said. "I even believe she would try to stop me."

"She would stop you," Susan Lewis said. "I'm certain she would."

Henri was drawing off his white gloves, folding them and putting them in a pocket. "No. Because I'm going right now. I'm going to ask Howard to take me—drive me to New York tonight. I don't mind his knowing; not now. For, after all, this is something that is none of his affair."

"And you," Susan said, "you trust me to stand here, and just say nothing?"

"Not without being kissed first," Henri said and, stepping forward, swiftly kissed her.

"Henri!" Susan Lewis said in a low voice. "Henri!" But already he had turned and was gone, in towards the champagne and the dancing where his cousin was, and, for just a moment, she stood there, listening to her heart.

The machine Howard Mays had got as a present for his seventeenth birthday was a massive thing of French manufacture, with a long and brass-ribbed hood, a chain drive and fenders which, Susan Lewis had told him several times, reminded her of wings—vulture's wings. The little ex-coachman chauffeur who tended the thing for him had it out in the courtyard in the rear of the house and was pouring oil and gasoline and water prodigally into it, and the two young men were adjusting long linen dusters and driving goggles when Susan got there. They both sprang out at her at once, determinedly, and the chauffeur, who had known them all their lives, went right on pouring oil and gas.

"No," Susan said, "I'm going. Either I'm going, or I shall stand right here and scream. You both know how well I can scream."

YES, they admitted, tight-lipped, they did. "But," Howard Mays began, prodding behind him surreptitiously at Henri's bag in one of the car's bucket seats, "we're only going to go in to the Palmer House in Boston, and have a couple of whiskies, and come right back, just to try the motor out."

"You're going to New York," Susan Lewis said. "You, Howard Mays, you're taking Henri off to war. Sneaking—both of you . . ."

Howard Mays made a sound which was

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almost profane, and the chauffeur, who already had the long brass crank out of the strap, swung it over, and the motor boomed, softly rumbled, then roared. "If you think . . ." said Susan Lewis, then sprang in, up over the long-handled gear shift, in past the wheel.

In the moment that the chauffeur tried to cough, cousin looked at cousin. "It's your car," Henri reminded at last. "And you promised to take me to New York."

"That's right," Howard Mays said. Reaching out, he found the handle to the compartment behind the twin bucket seats, opened it, brought forth another linen duster, another pair of goggles and a helmet. "You should be spanked," he said to Susan Lewis, shoving those articles into her hands. "But, as I can't do that, I'm going to just about frighten you to death, between here and New York."

"Frighten," Susan said over a mouthful of hairpins as she pulled the helmet on, "all you're worth!"

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Howard Mays did not make really good time until he was south of New London, and then, handling the great car as though it were an animate thing, driving it roaring, lurching, screaming and skidding down the slanted yellowness of the dusty summer roads, he maintained an average of very close to eighty miles an hour all the way into New York. Once, of course, on the old Post Road, between Bridgeport and Fairfield, he brushed the back wheel off a lightless buggy, and even beyond the motor's sounds they could hear for a distance the bawled and profane cries of the farmer, and the frantic course of the horse off through the fields with the remains of the buggy.

Then, too, in the Bronx, a sleepy patrolman crossing the otherwise deserted street to his call-box looked up just in time and jumped, to sprawl on all fours, but land cursing, and with his life and limbs fully intact. After that, Howard Mays drove a little slower, so that for the first time scraps of conversation were possible if the words were shouted at full lung force.

"You're going—where?" Howard Mays roared at Susan. "To your aunt's on Sixty-first Street?"

"I am going," Susan howled back, "where you are going!" She stared at both of them; then, even louder, "You heard me. I can see you did!"

Howard Mays made a gesture with one hand lifted from the wheel. "We're going to a ship—the first ship that sails for France!"

STANDING crouched half upright, Henri de la Goustier started to say that he, alone, was going on that ship to France, "or else—"

Susan Lewis pulled him down. "I'm losing my voice," she screamed at them. "If not my mind, too. Stop this thing—go somewhere where you can stop this thing, before we all begin to gibber!"

Howard Mays took them to Jack's, parked squarely before the main entrance on Sixth Avenue. Jack's, he said, right after he had cut the motor off, was no place to take a Smith College freshman like Susan, but it was the sort of place where at this time of the night a man was certain of finding out when and where the next ship sailed for France.

"You look, both of you," Susan Lewis said, staggering as she took her first paces on the sidewalk, "like a couple of runaway foundlings, and I like something that had been sent after you, to frighten you, or anybody else to death."

"Oysters will fix that," Henri admitted, "oysters, and champagne."

The barman had run out of everything but clams near four o'clock, and after that they just drank champagne. "I'm going now," Henri de la Goustier said, near five o'clock. "I want to call Mother up, and say good-by to her, then I've got to get down and see the French consul before the ship sails."

"All right," his cousin told him. "First, I guess, we'd better take Susan up and hand her over at her aunt's."

"You," Henri de la Goustier corrected him. "Not 'we.'"

"Are you," Howard Mays asked, leaning across the table and past Susan, "trying to make this war so horribly personal?"

IN answer, quietly, Henri de Goustier caught the end of his cousin's white tie and pulled it. "I don't want to hit you," he explained then, "while you're sitting down. But, I am going to that ship alone, and aboard it alone, and not with you—and you are not going on it, at all. And this, I guess, is the only way I have of convincing you . . ."

"Get up!" Howard Mays said, getting up himself.

"The waiters," Susan said in a weary voice, "remember all those waiters."

"Afterwards," Henri de la Goustier promised, and swung cleanly again at his cousin's jaw.

The waiters, Jack's flying wedge, surrounded them, enveloped them, and deposited them, panting and powerless, upon the fresh dawn sidewalk of Sixth Avenue, where Susan Lewis came in a moment, wordlessly, to join them, bearing their dus-

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ters and goggles. "Here," she said, holding the goggles dangling out, but both of them already had stepped back from her and were squaring off, and from the corner, three large-sized officers of the law were rapidly advancing.

From inside, with some professional curiosity, the members of Jack's flying wedge watched the three representatives of civic justice repeat outside, with much less success, what they had just finished.

"I own the car, yes," Howard Mays said when he could listen uninterruptedly to what the sergeant and largest of the trio had to say.

"And with it," the sergeant said, "all but took th' life av a city officer at Brook Aven-yuh . . . Come!"

"Look here a moment," Howard Mays began. "This other gentleman and I are going—"

"Th' other gentleman," the sergeant said, "has nothin' to do wit' it. Nothin', that is, if he acts nice an' dandy from now on an' takes th' young lady home. In th' mornin', maybe, laddy-buck, when ye've seen th' judge . . ."

Susan Lewis was weeping; for the first time, in front of anybody, and here on a New York sidewalk before five very surprised and immediately uncomfortable men, she was weeping. "Officer," she said to the sergeant, "officer . . ." But then she threw her arms around Howard Mays and kissed him, turned and stared at Henri de la Goustier in his turn. "It's not," she said, "not the champagne, or the oysters, or that Howie's going to jail, and that you're going to war, it's just that—that you're both so damn silly!"

Past her and around her, allowed the opportunity by the momentary mental and physical paralysis of the law, cousin stared at cousin. "About me," Howard Mays said, "you don't have to worry. I'll be out and I'll be there; you'll be seeing me . . . Now get a hansom and take Susan home; you won't, unless you're luckier than you think, be seeing her!"

"I salute you." Standing there beside Susan Lewis, one arm out to grasp her arm politely, Henri de la Goustier saluted him. "Don't be too late!"

CHAPTER III.

THE BATTLE OF PARIS.

HOWARD MAYS got there three months later, after the Marne, with an ambulance unit he had organized and whose machines had been bought with his mother's money. But Henri de la Goustier he did not see until along late in the winter. Howard Mays was out of the ambulance by then, had left the unit to his friends and the care of the French government, was no longer wearing the insignia of the red cross of mercy upon his tunic collar, but the exploding grenade device of the Foreign Legion.

He came upon Henri de la Goustier in Paris, where Henri was getting over the effects of his second wound and the bestowal of the Military Medal. Henri was seated at a table on the sidewalk of the Café de la Paix, very pale and smart in his flaming red breeches and khaki tunic of an officer of the Colonial Army. Howard Mays, just down from the front and unshaved as yet, clumsy-seeming in the long *capote,* the bagged breeches and heavy *brodequins* of the Legion, came right up to him and saluted, but grinning as he did so, and grinning broadly.

"Can the lieutenant give the unshaven slug of a private the pleasure of sitting with him, maybe even drinking with him?" Howard Mays asked him in his atrocious French. He was already in a chair across the marble-topped table from his cousin, had his *képi* in his lap and his bald-shaven head back to bawl at the gaping waiter.

"I would hate to make a soldier of the Legion get up, once he's ordered a drink," Henri de la Goustier said. "But, how do you like the show, Howard?"

"All right, now that I'm away from pushing one of mother's nice ambulances around. They give as much combat duty to us in the Legion as they do to you and your wild-eyed Senegalese blacks. Your

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boys can fight, though; I saw them doing some of it, last week. We were right beside them."

"You're *en permission* now, then?" Henri said. "Down here on leave?"

Howard Mays laughed at him over his cognac glass. "Me? No; I just took 'System D' and walked out. They've got us back in support now, and there won't be any fighting for a couple of days, and I guess I'll be back up by then."

Henri de la Goustier scowled at him as he drank. "I might point out," he said, "that you're technically a deserter, *mon cousin*, and that you've just admitted the fact to an officer of your own brigade. Drink that, though, and have another with me; another drink won't make you any different than you are now. But, in the Legion, you'll find out that a man can't do those things and get away with them. 'Discipline' is one of the two words the Legion carries on its flag."

"I've heard that," Howard Mays said, the smile still at his broad mouth. "But, how is your mother, and have you heard from Susan?"

"Susan writes that for every letter she sends me, she sends you one, too," Henri said. "So, I guess we probably get just the same sort of news."

"No," his cousin said. His big and newly calloused hands were out flat on the table surface and his eyes were narrowed as he spoke. "I guess that maybe we don't . . ."

"The last word of the name of this place means peace," Henri de la Goustier said. "And I like it. I imagine both of us can get enough of—the other, up in the lines."

"Your logic," Howard Mays told him, "seems to grow in inverse ratio with that mustache of yours. But, I wouldn't fight with you—not sitting down."

PERHAPS even then, though, they might not have fought that day if it had not been for the fact that at along about eleven o'clock at night a *gendarme* stationed on the Boulevard Haussman saw a man in the uniform of a private of the Legion slapping upon the back, as if affectionately, another young man who wore the uniform of a lieutenant of a crack colonial regiment and a new medal and a new wound stripe.

The *gendarme* approached and waggled his white club, and advised the man in the uniform of the Legion not to slap any officer upon the back in public, and to desist with this one, right here. Howard Mays then called the *gendarme* a French name, a name he had learned from one of the old-timers in the Legion, and not at all a nice one.

With that the *gendarme* made the mistake of reaching out for Howard Mays's shoulder, thus laying his jaw provocatively close, high and unprotected. Howard Mays hit it accurately and instantly for him and the *gendarme* stretched flat, losing his cap and club and most of his senses. "Come on," Howard Mays said to his cousin. "That arranges that *pium*."

"No," Henri said. "That one may be a *pium* all right, but perhaps you forget that he isn't alone in Paris. There are four more of them up there at the corner. they all saw you hit this one, they all are coming this way. And I can't run very well, anyhow."

THE four *gendarmes*, as surprised as anything else at first, and rather naturally unprepared to cope with two such excellently capable young men as those two facing them, fell soon, and fell hard, joining their companion upon the sidewalk in recumbency. "Now as for you," Henri de la Goustier said, "let me at once tell you I think you're a complete ass to have hit that first man."

Sucking a skinned knuckle absently, Howard Mays studied him for a moment. "You wouldn't," he asked, "like to back up that statement with anything physical?"

"Not here, no," his cousin said. "Everywhere you step here, you step on a *gendarme*. But, out in the Bois, you won't."

"Listen, though, you just got out of hospital."

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"That," Henri de la Goustier said, stepping forward to signal the first four cylinder taxicab he saw, "is a very bad way of getting out of an invitation, isn't it?"

"I'll give you the answer to that," Howard Mays promised him, "out in the Bois."

They fought out in the Bois for perhaps twenty minutes. Howard Mays struck the first blow, which his cousin neatly countered, to then cross him with a left which opened up Howard Mays's right eye. In fact, in the next five minutes, scientifically and coldly, he opened up both Howard Mays's eyes; his wound, Henri de la Goustier knew very well, had really been a minor one, but it was bothering him badly right now, and, also, his cousin was a very stubborn man.

The fight ended when Howard Mays tripped upon the grass in the darkness, sat down and found he had neither the sight, the ability nor the ambition to get up. Before him, for just a moment, Henri de la Goustier wavered, still erect, then also stumbled down beside him. "Shake, you competent butcher, you," Howard Mays told him, gropingly holding forth his hand.

"Yes, I will," Henri de la Goustier said. "Now take this handkerchief and stop those cuts from bleeding. After that, I'm going to take you home, and sneak you in past Mother. Then, tomorrow, you'd better leave Paris, before the military police come after us, in squads . . ."

CHAPTER IV.

MUTINY.

IT was over a year and a half then before they saw each other again; war, the strange, bitter business of day to day fighting kept them busy and apart. In the same brigade, in the Moroccan division commanded by the man his soldiers called "The Butcher," they were flung into attack time and time again, from one spearhead of the Western Front to another, through the Chemin-des-Dames battles, and the Vosges, the unbelievable fury of the holocausts of Verdun where the Crown Prince made his gamble of a million men for Paris.

In those months, Susan Lewis was their sole connecting link, the only way they heard vaguely from and of each other. In their rare turns in rest billets, or at the front, her letters to them separately from the States gave in exchange the news she had received from each of them. Henri de la Goustier, so Susan wrote to Howard Mays, had received his captaincy and the Cross of the Legion of Honor, and not since 1915 had he again been wounded; his good luck now seemed to be permanent.

Howard Mays, his cousin learned from Susan's pages, was still no more than a first class private of the Legion, although he had been decorated several times and more than once had been raised temporarily to a corporalcy or sergeantship. Discipline, the discipline of the Legion, Howard Mays fought as much as he had fought any other thing in his violent and unregulated life. Fighting, he had written to Susan, was what he had come to France to do, not to drill or clean quarters when he was back in a rest area.

Then, when there was no fighting to be done, he wanted to get to Paris, be free, to do as he wished, and take orders from no man. In fact, he wrote her in his latest letter from the military prison at Tours, he was still taking orders from no man, had beaten up, successively, two sergeants and a corporal who had tried to hold him in what he believed to be undue check, and gone off to Paris, if only to be caught there by the military police and be brought back here, held for trial.

Henri de la Goustier got that letter relayed from Susan one night just as he was bringing his company in from the lines. He sat in a corner of brigade headquarters close to a candle and read it three times. Then he tore it into pieces, held the pieces to the candle flame, got up and sought out his colonel, asked for leave to go to Paris, afterwards to Tours. Striking a non-com in the Legion, during time of war, Henri de la Goustier knew, equally as well as How-

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ard Mays, was considered unquestionably to be mutiny.

And the findings of the court before which Howard Mays was to be brought in the following week could only achieve one verdict: military execution, despite the prisoner's fine battle record, his decorations, his nationality and his family.

IN Paris, Henri had dinner with a red-faced and round little man, *le Papa* Joffre, once Commander in Chief of the French Armies, and once a lieutenant on colonial service with another young lieutenant, another Count Henri Phillipe de la Goustier. At that dinner, the present Count de la Goustier and the old, slow-voiced

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general spoke in some detail of a little jungle engagement upon the bank of a river in Senegal, where the Count de la Goustier's father had been killed, and then, in the same deliberate and calm fashion, talked also of an American private in the Foreign Legion, now awaiting trial in the military prison at Tours.

About him, Howard Mays, his cousin Henri de la Goustier mentioned two things: one, the rather strictly guarded military secret that very soon now, in a week or so, the United States was going to join the Allies against Germany; the other, the prisoner's excellent combat record. To put such a man, an American citizen of a really illustrious family, between a wall and a firing squad, no matter for what reasons, Henri pointed out, might have a rather dampening effect upon the lately aroused martial feeling of the American nation. Whereas, after the entrance of the United States into the war, the man now in the military prison at Tours might readily be transferred to the American Expeditionary Force, and all his troubles be no longer in French hands . . .

He rose shortly after he had said that, received the polite and French salute of affection and admiration upon both cheeks, shook hands with the man last to see his father alive, and went forth into Paris to cable Susan Lewis. Two days later, a sealed order for the commandant pinned inside his tunic pocket, he was admitted to the prison at Tours, and to the cell where Howard Mays sat.

Howard Mays wore loose dungaree, fatigue slacks. He rested immobile on his plank bunk in the dim light of the cell, his feet spread, his big hands between his knees, and with his head back, so that Henri de la Goustier, silently staring, could see the faint, white line of the scar a piece of shell casing had made, across his forehead and up into his hair line.

"I don't want to see you; not at all," Howard Mays said. Behind him, in a corner of the cell, were stacked packages of cigarettes and bottles of *vin ordinaire*, many of them empty, some of them still full; the men of the Legion had not forgotten their wild American, Henri thought, no matter what Headquarters had done.

"If you don't want to see me, that's all right," he said to Howard Mays. He looked over his shoulder, but the guard had gone down the corridor, leaving the cell door ajar. "I'll have to tell you myself," he said. "Come on out of here. I—it's all fixed up."

"What do you mean, 'fixed up'?" Howard Mays said in a low harsh voice. But then he reached behind him, for a bottle of wine, and he could not control his hand from shaking as he reached.

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"The States have joined the Allies," said Henri. "You come in with us, next week; your country, I mean."

HOWARD MAYS was wrenching at the bottle cork with his teeth. He spat bits of cork across the cell. For a minute, several minutes, he sat silent, there against the wall. Up into the cell to them came the sounds of the sergeant drilling a squad below in the compound, the commands dimmed by distance, and, staring at each other, they both remembered another time when they had been together in a place where repeated sounds came vaguely in, and where they had stared into each other's eyes, acutely and in that time also consciously hating each other.

"You had no right to do that," Howard Mays said. His voice was steady. "None at all. . ." But he laughed as he spoke, and held the bottle out. "Excuse me, Captain; my courtesy is kind of lousy; I—haven't entertained any other guests here."

Henri de la Goustier took the bottle and lifted it in the motion of a toasting gesture. "*La victoire,*" he said. "Let's think of that."

Howard Mays brought up his hand in a kind of careless half salute. "Sure," he said. "Men like you will see that the War'll be won—" He took the bottle in his turn, neatly drank a third of it, dropped it thudding down. "I don't know why I'm drinking with you," he said. "Except that you've beaten me so well. You've certainly won, now."

"I don't understand you," Henri said. "All I have is your discharge from the French Foreign Legion here, an honorable discharge, for a man who has won all the medals the army he served had to offer. . . If you want, you can hop right down to Paris tonight and see the American ambassador; you'll be commissioned by the United States Army here in France, before the first of your expeditionary force gets over."

"Yes, you've got it well arranged, all right," Howard Mays told him. "You've finally squared it with me, and with my side of the family—all the old debts. You've finally caught up with the Old Man, with Grandfather, now, haven't you, and all that he did to your father?"

"Don't be the complete fool," Henri de la Goustier said mildly. "That has got nothing to do with it at all, and, if it did, your own father was met with the same problems and statements, in all effect, as mine was, and lost his life for much the same reasons."

HOWARD MAYS laughed at him, a bit wildly. "Oh, no. Your father was a foreigner, a Frenchman, a man from an old and a logical people, an old and logical family; he might 've died because he was disturbed a little bit by what the Old Man told him, but that was only because the Old Man, an American, and in his time a wild nut like myself, had disturbed his—your father's logic for a short while. But, I don't even believe that much, though; I believe that your father went off and back into the French Colonial Army, and eventually got himself killed, because the Old Man showed him how absolutely hollow his life had been up until that time—yes, the Old Man made your Dad ashamed of himself, and that's the thing you can't get over, right now. That's why—"

"Shut up!" Henri said. "You're only talking a lot of idiotic echoes."

"I'd like a good, solid smack at your jaw," Howard Mays said. "How's that for an echo? Why, you—*pium,* you. . . My life is my own; rather, was my own, until you came along and stuck your face into it."

"It soon would not have been yours, or anybody's," Henri said, with a suggestion of calmness still about his words.

"And whose business was that but mine? Now, though, you can have the pleasure of telling yourself you saved my life for me, got me out of prison, got me out of and into a lot of things I never wished for. . . So you can write back to Susan and say, in effect, 'I finally had to save the wild man from going before a firing squad. He

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thought everything he saw was his, to do with as he wanted, and nobody was going to stop him in anything, just as the Old Man used to think.' So making yourself out a triple-starred hero and philanthropist to Susan, and— Why, do you think they would have ever put me against a wall and actually shot me?"

"Yes, I certainly do, and within a week."

HOWARD MAYS laughed and cursed at him softly. "And do you think I ever would have let them?" He jerked one hand towards the cell window's bars. "Without first getting out through there, or, at least, hanging myself?"

"You're released from both those joys right now," Henri said. "I'm sorry." He was getting to his feet from the end of the bunk where he had seated himself, straightening his tunic hem, putting his stick and gloves into one hand so that he could hold the other out to his cousin. "Don't hold such thoughts as those you've just told me, Howard," he said. "This is no maneuver on my part towards Susan. It's no gesture at all. I'm just your cousin, and you have been and are a brave and fine soldier, and I saw no sense, if I could help you a little, in not doing it."

"So?" Howard Mays was up on his feet and close to him. "But do you think that Susan will ever forget it, or that I ever can forget it, this 'helping' of yours?"

"You're the only one to answer that," Henri said. He had his hand out still. "Good-by, Howard. And good luck."

Howard Mays, the rage hot and almost blinding in him, looked at his cousin, then past him, where the cell door was ajar, the door that led from here and to all the world, and then at the guard who stood there, knowing him, Mays, and how he customarily acted, so that the guard's hand was upon the butt of the pistol slung at his left side.

"*Au revoir, pium,*" Howard Mays said. "When you've got through winning this war, you and I can meet, and then I'll give you my pay for this job. Get lots more medals!"

Henri de la Goustier stared at the guard also, and nearly dropped his stick and gloves to the planks of the bunk so his hands would be free, to form into fists, to strike. But then, trying to smile, trying to show that he was calm and did not show rage and a rage that amounted almost to hatred, he backed towards the door, through it and out of it. There he turned, without further word, and walked quickly away, hearing distinctly from behind him his cousin's bawled and jeering laughter.

CHAPTER V.

FOR THE LAST TIME.

SUSAN wore an ensemble of soft dove gray, with the short skirts and the small hat the years following right after the War had brought into vogue. Rising from his chair and staring from his copy of *Le Temps* which he had not been reading, Henri de la Goustier decided that he never had seen her looking so lovely. She held out both her ungloved hands to him and he took them, held them tightly.

"The same Susan," he said.

"Only a little older than in 1910, and 1914 and '18. Why is it that you and I only see each other at intervals of four or five or six years?"

Henri shrugged at that, the only really French gesture he allowed himself. "A number of things," he said, knowing, as he said the words, that she would not believe him.

"I wouldn't want to call the thirty-second Count Henri Phillipe Sevran de la Goustier a liar," Susan said, smiling at him a little bit.

"Let's go in the bar and have a drink," Henri said. "So, if you want to, you can do it there. But, I'd like to have Susan tell the old delinquent why Susan is in Paris."

"You'll end up by making me blush, I guess," Susan said. "Because Susan's one real reason for being in Paris is to see the Count de la Goustier."

They were in the hotel bar now, and

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moving towards a corner table, and Susan was in front of him, and in that moment he was very grateful that she did not turn her glance to study his face.

"That's awfully nice," he said, slowly. "And what can I do for Susan?"

"Buy her a small glass of sherry wine, then listen to her," said Susan. "And I should like a cigarette with my wine. . ."

SHE sat still and silent for quite a long time after she had received her cigarette and her wine. But then looking up squarely at him, she said, "It's about Howard that I've come to see you, Henri. You must know that, you must have sensed it somehow."

He said, very low, "Yes, I did. . . How is Howard now?"

"He's all right; he's getting better, a whole lot better than he has been. But, you know what has happened to him?"

"No, only a little of it. As you know, I've been here in France, ever since the War."

"And Howard has been everywhere. You remember what happened when America went into the War; he was sent right home to the States, to train the green troops, and never did get back to the Front. Of course, he didn't look upon that as luck."

"No," said Henri, scowling down at his glass, "and no man remotely like him would. I—"

"You had nothing to do with that."

"No; naturally."

"But, Howard thinks differently. Somehow he blames you, somehow he thinks you did. I. . . But, no, I'll tell it all consecutively and briefly. He was at a wholly loose end when the Armistice was signed. He did any number of things. He flew planes, and he sailed fast boats, and he played polo, shot big game, he even went into business for a short while, and helped lose some of the family money. He was—" She stopped, gazing fully at him.

"I know," Henri said. His voice was rigorously quiet, but there was a strained and intense undernote to it and he sat with his cane gripped strongly in his powerful hands. "He was looking for frontiers, for more action, more fighting, something for a man of his nature and his heritage and blood to do, for something which would suit a grandson of the Old Man, his grandfather, and my grandfather. But there aren't any more frontiers to be shoved back, and no action such as he wants, or if there are, he didn't find them. . . But what is the matter now?"

Susan was twisting and turning her glass with her graceful fingers. "It's as I said, a little while ago," she said. "He's better now than he was. He finally started writing to me again, and coming to see me again, and he hadn't done that for several years, not since the spring of 1917, when he came out of the Legion and went into the American Army and was sent on duty at home. The Olympic matches are this summer, of course, and he used to be an excellent boxer, an intercollegiate champion. I've got him interested in that. He's gone in for the tryouts, and he's made the team, and they've made him the captain of it. In the States, they say that he's the best amateur middle-weight boxer in the world."

HENRI stared up at that from studying the head of his cane, and his eyes suddenly had been possessed by a dark gleam. "Is that so?" he asked.

"Yes," Susan said. "In America, they consider him fully capable of winning the Olympics and becoming the amateur world champion."

In answer, Henri said nothing; slowly he turned his head aside, but, watching him closely, Susan Lewis could not help but notice the tightening of the lines about his mouth, his eyes and jaw. "Henri," she said softly, and he turned, and again looked at her.

"I know," he said. "I admit it. . . I've always been in love with you, and he's always been in love with you, ever since we were kids. And here we are, all of us grown, and still acting as kids. You're not, of course—but he and I have been."

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"I said you'd make me blush," Susan said, the color rising along her throat to her chin and her eyes and brows.

In sharp, vibrant French, Henri de la Goustier called himself a very stupid fool. "I never—" he began.

"Yes," Susan said, "you had to get him out of that prison at Tours, you had to go to Papa Joffre for clemency for him, or they would have taken him out against a wall and shot him. He knows that himself now; he admits that."

"But it doesn't do any good?"

"No, it doesn't do any good. . . For an instant, Susan took her eyes from his grave and intent face and looked around the bar, filled now with gayly laughing and talking people gathered there for the cocktail hour. Then, spacing her words, pronouncing them deliberately, she said to Henri, "I've known you long enough and well enough, Henri, and I'm old enough myself now, I guess, to tell you this: Ever since the three of us were kids together, I've known that you and Howard were in love with me. I can say, too, that I've been in love with you, both of you. Truly, I've never been able to make up my mind about either of you, and I've never been able to fall in love with another man. And since the War—"

"—We've both shunned you," Henri broke in upon her. "I admit that to you, right now, on my part; I've done that, although I knew that I loved you, and that you also knew it. I've just buried myself most of the time down at the family's old place in Normandy and stayed there, but not really getting anywhere, and not really doing anything. But what is it that I can do now?"

Susan smiled at him, lightly and shortly let one of her hands rest upon one of his. "You're just about as nice as you can be, Henri," she said. "Let me say that, first."

"But not nice enough," he said. "You want this thing to stop, don't you, this sort of really hidden hatred and bad blood between cousins, the thing that's keeping you from choosing one of us, or even being able to fully love him alone?"

"Yes, Henri," Susan said. "That's it, fully and exactly."

"All right," Henri said. "Tell me how I can change it, even vaguely suggest some way."

SUSAN smiled at him, the smile tender, wistful, and at the same time slightly tragic. "It's strange," she said, "but almost always, I've been trying to restrain you and Howard from fighting with each other, and usually failing in it. Now, I've come here to you to suggest it—that you and he have one final fight, agreed upon between you, two mature and honorable men, that it is to be a final thing. And then let it all go with that, let me afterwards make my choice between you, but, far more than that, be able to go your own ways in the world yourselves, not embittered and loaded with that old, galling hatred."

"How?" Henri de la Goustier asked. "Just tell me how."

Susan held forth her cigarette tip to be lit, inhaled and let the smoke go, gazed up at its clouding for a moment. "In the Olympic matches coming this summer," she said. "You're both practically the same weight, the same age and height, and you've both been through practically the same things. You used to be an excellent boxer before the War, and were considered the best amateur in Europe; if you wanted to, you could soon get back into shape, make and lead your own Olympic team. This thing of nationalities has always been a big issue between you and Howard, too; I know that you've always persisted in believing that if it weren't for the fact that your Father was a Frenchman, the Old Man would never have criticized and attacked him as he did, when he came to the Old Man about marrying your mother. In the Olympics, you would be fighting for yourselves, and for your countries; you would finish it all up. And, as much as anything else, it would give you both something to do—you, who are born fighters, but now have no fighting serious or important enough to claim you. . ."

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Henri de la Goustier did not reply for some few seconds. When he did, his eyes had been shut and he had been softly smiling, in memory, memory of old fights. "It will square a great many things," he said aloud at last to Susan. "It should purify an awful lot of bad blood. . . And the man who wins?"

Susan was blushing again, deeply and completely this time. But she was able finally to smile at him, and hold forth her

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hand calmly in thanks and in a compacting of her words:

"The man who wins, and the man who loses, they can both always come to see me. It won't be my fight; it will be yours, between you two, alone."

"But," Henri said, grinning as he posed the words, "you've always liked a winner, haven't you, Susan?"

"Yes," Susan said in a steady voice, "that's so; I have."

CHAPTER VI.

"THE WINNER!"

THEY met in the finals of the Olympics, Henri de la Goustier and his cousin, Howard Mays, for what they both sincerely believed was to be the last fight between them. It had been, they were to remember afterwards, smiling a little bitterly, at least for the amateur middleweight championship of the world. That fight was conducted in an open-air arena, and before a maximum crowd, many of whom had come from all over the world to see it.

In the history of the modern Olympic games, anyhow, the assembled sports writers and correspondents sent out over the cables and telegraph wires, there had never been another fight at all equalling it in dramatic and personal value. In their articles, inescapably, almost, they stressed the facts that the two men to face each other were cousins, men of powerful and distinguished families, grandsons of the famous old frontier-buster and fighter in his own glorious right, Howard Gill.

Their war records were cited, and, here and there and more than once in the columns of the more gossipy correspondents, implications were made as to the feeling of bad blood between the two men. And, oddly, somehow, neither of the two principals minded it; here, anyhow, they told themselves, smiling sharply and remembering all the other and now ancient, seemingly inconsequential and certainly indecisive fights, was going to be the end.

They saw each other, they talked and laughed and dined with each other in the weeks before the matches, and during the earlier days while the other parts of the games were run off. And, the night before they fought, they dined together with Susan Lewis. It was really a gay dinner party; the old, underlying restraint which always had been upon them when the three of them had been together in the past was gone now, lifted, transferred to the morrow by these men who had faced action so much in their lives, were aware now that they already had done everything to prepare themselves for what was to come.

"IT'S been like living in a show-case, for you two," Susan Lewis said finally towards the close of the simple dinner. "And I feel somehow responsible for it, in part, anyway. But you've always fought, haven't you?"

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They smiled at her, and at each other, lean, tanned, physically keyed and vibrant, once more sensing and anticipating all the wild and magnificent thrill of battle.

"Yes," said Howard Mays, "we always have. But it's you who've had the good sense to see that we finish it off, this way. If this isn't the end, nothing will be."

Through the soft luminosity of the candle light upon the table, Susan Lewis gave her glance to him, then to Henri de la Goustier. Suddenly, inexplicably, through the gayety she had summoned up for them here tonight, a sensation of doubt, of insecurity and fear stabbed through. Their hatred for each other was the most dominant thing in each of these men's lives; it was the one great and somehow awful heritage they had got from their fathers. No fight, the dark premonition warned her, could ever settle this thing between them. Death, she thought, perhaps alone could do that.

And even her love, her love for one of them or both of them, could do nothing, essentially meant nothing in the face of it. Yet they must go on, go out there tomorrow, and once more attempt it anyhow, returning again to the primeval, the terrible and the savage, and thus trying to rid themselves of something that so far had seemed to run flaming and forever through their blood and the dark, rear chambers of their brains. To them, she said:

"I'm going back to the hotel now. I'm going to bed. This thing seems to have strung me up much more than it has you two. But," and she summoned a smile for them now, "I'll be seeing you, tomorrow, both of you. . . No, don't come with me; I prefer to go home alone. I—" her low voice nearly broke for an instant—"I wish you all the luck I have. Good night."

They stood and bowed and said good night to her, standing almost shoulder to shoulder, then sat again.

"Well," Howard Mays said, his gaze fierce and unmasked in the candle light, "we've been right in one thing in our lives, anyway; we've both picked her to love."

"And this ends it?" Henri said.

"This ends it, yes," Howard Mays said. "It should—it's all too old and, in some funny way, stupid, now."

"And the man who wins tomorrow?" Henri went on.

"The man who wins it," said his cousin rapidly and fiercely, "goes to Susan—alone. The other is through. He goes his own way. But he doesn't come back. Not to Susan."

"No," Henri de la Goustier said, the cords of his throat standing out, his lips drawn a little back, "the other man, who loses, doesn't go back to Susan. The man who wins goes to her. . . I wish you luck tomorrow, Howard. *Toute la chance.*"

"The same," his cousin said. "All the luck to you." They stood lithely, quickly upright, wide on their feet, eyeing each other as they always and instinctively had done.

Then Howard Mays held forth his hand and his cousin took it, grasped it.

"Tomorrow," Henri de la Goustier said.

"That's right," Howard Mays said. "Tomorrow."

IT was in the middle of the second round when the gray and huge storm cloud which had been upon the horizon almost since noon started to come down, low, growing instantly heavier and darker, taking away all bright light, seeming to lower right above the huge crowd packed into the arena and over the heads of the two men in the ring.

But to them it did not exist. They saw nothing but each other. Their world began, concentrated and ended within the narrow confines of the roped and canvassed ring where they stood together and alone and fought. Howard Mays had won the first round; no one could doubt that, not even the man who fought against him. From the opening gong, he had gone in after the other man, boring with shocking, shrewd body blows, slashing at the face and the jaw, swift in his every motion and blow, sure, terrible in the certainty and speed of his attack, never allowing the other man a moment in which to catch him

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unprotected or find a split second for the starting of a counter-attack of his own.

It was the same in the second round; he led, forcing continuously, driving with long rights and lefts, whirling out of the brief clinches only to return to the attack again, catching his opponent with body jabs and counters which brought great red and blue welts from the skin, his own body and face yet untouched.

But, as the first spatter of rain slapped down on his bare shoulder, he looked involuntarily up, and Henri de la Goustier hit him then, hooked him with a crossed right to the jaw, set him back on his heels, tore in now in his turn, flailing with quick and stinging, chopping blows, holding the lead, fiercely, coolly keeping it.

He drove Mays into the ropes. He kept him there until the other man clinched and the referee tapped them on the shoulders to break.

Then he only let him come off in a barrage of blows which brought him upright, out of his loose style of fighting stance, shocked time and again by body and head blows he now could not counter or find the speed and accuracy to duplicate.

The great gray cloud had broken right overhead; rain split down at them in jumping, dousing gray sheets. A vast, groaning, cursing kind of chorus went up from the crowd. The referee stared over at the timekeeper, at the other officials just outside the ring. He could hardly see them; the opacity of the rain was between them and him. It was even difficult for him to see the forms of the two fighting, straining men. He turned on the already pooled and soaking canvas to watch them more closely, knowing that nothing would stop them now and that this fight was to end very briefly and completely.

HOWARD MAYS had gone to one knee, driven there by a shuddering right hook to the jaw. But he was coming up, was up, swinging in, wide-open, risking everything in the one series of blows he ripped out from his crouching position. Squarely planted, fighting just as openly and desperately now, Henri stood to meet him, came in after him.

The impact of wet, packed leather against flesh was so swift as to make a ripped, blurred, continuous sound. Then one of Mays's long, hooking rights caught the other man's jaw, spun him, sprawled him, and he went down, to his knees and elbows, waited until the count of seven, then came up, grinning, bloody-mouthed, but clear-eyed yet, strong and deadly.

Howard Mays rushed him, at once, struck twice for the jaw. A flurry of countering blows met him, jarred his body and head, swung him, flung him down as he pulled his head into safety against his shoulder from one of them.

He was on one knee, waiting, watching, then started up, off the canvas, moved his body as though he were going to lift that knee, come instantly back into a fighting position.

And Henri de la Goustier was off the ropes at the other side of the ring and at him so swiftly that to the crowd the movement of his body was nothing but a dim, white flashing through the dull rain screens. The referee was close, right behind and slightly at an angle from Henri de la Goustier, and not four feet from where Howard Mays crouched. He distinctly saw Howard Mays start to come upright, off his knee, then slip and go back, and in that instant be struck slamming, smashing on the jaw.

Howard Mays went backwards out of the ring, through and over the ropes in a kind of parabolic dive. He landed among the typewriters and telegraph keys of the plank tables arranged for the newspaper men. He stayed there, stayed there until some four or five minutes later, when they had revived him sufficiently so that he could go back into the ring, and after the referee had talked with the other ring officials.

When he came back into the ring, Henri de la Goustier was standing in his own corner, his arms out on the ropes, his head forward, his face an absolute, ash white, his eyes dully staring.

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The referee stood clear and lifted his voice through the rain. It was the decision of the judges, he said in strong, sharp words, that Howard Mays of the United States of America be declared the winner on a foul. He turned, and started to lift Howard Mays's hand, and the crowd rose and roared at him until at last he silenced them, reiterated the judges' decision once again, added, to the shouts and comments of the newspapermen, that Howard Mays had been knocked out by his opponent, had been struck while still on one knee.

HENRI had his gloves off by then, had ripped them. Slowly, still a little dazedly, he walked across the ring to where the referee stood with Howard and the American's seconds and coach. He held his stiff, taped hand out to his cousin. "I'm sorry," he said in a low voice from which he held all emotion and vibrancy. "I'm sorry that it happened this way. But you won. And that's all, I guess. Congratulations." He turned, pushing quietly past those who tried to stop him, crawled through the ropes, found his dressing robe there and went from the ring.

But Susan Lewis was there at the door of his dressing room under the immense concrete arena when he came there, and she waited until he had sent away the men who followed him before she spoke. "I don't understand," she said. "I—just don't understand."

His mouth where the rain washed the blood thinly now, formed for her in a smile. "It's a technicality," he said. "A technical decision, due to what has been called a foul blow. Howard was on his knee when I struck him." He reached forth his taped hands and took Susan Lewis by the shoulders, pulled her quite close to him in the rain. "I wish you all the luck, Susan. All the luck in the world. It should be a most successful and amusing life."

He stood back. He bowed to her. Before she could speak, before she could reach out her hand to grasp and hold him, he was gone, and she stood solitary there in the rain, weeping, not only because Henri de la Goustier had lost, but because Howard Mays had won, like this.

CHAPTER VII.

HOWARD'S PLAN.

SUSAN LEWIS did not see Henri de la Goustier after that day. Not even Howard Mays, who sought for him everywhere as soon as he got to his dressing room and could change into street clothing, could find him. His coach of the Olympic boxing team sought for him also, and the newspapermen, indefatigably, for weeks. But his disappearance was and remained complete, of him there was no trace.

Despite those factors, though, and despite any willingness on Howard Mays's part to comment upon the fight, the way it had ended and the judges' decision making him the winner, the newspapers continued articles about him and his cousin for many weeks, and for months the Sunday sports pages were filled with the opinions and discussions of writers and spectators as to just what had happened, and, more often, what the decision should have been.

Susan read some of those articles for a time, then gave it up. She tried to think of something else, anything else, and tried to make Howard Mays withdraw himself from it. That, though, she found, was an impossible thing to perform; the memory of that fight and how it had ended seemed to be always in Howard Mays's mind, all but obsessed him.

"You must stop it, Howard," she told him one night. He had come for dinner at her home in the East Sixties, then taken her to New York's newest and noisiest night club, but had not laughed yet, had hardly spoken a half dozen sentences to her, and only then to ask her if she wished to dance. "That's all talk, idle and silly. You remember, don't you, the promise you and Henri made, the night before the fight—that it was to be the end, forever?"

He looked across the table at her and he tried to smile at her. Then he said, "Not

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that way. Not that kind of end, Susan, anyhow . . ."

"You couldn't help that," Susan said. "You slipped, and that's all there was to it, and you were on your knee when Henri hit you, and you won. All this, of course, I've told you times without count before."

Howard Mays seemed to be watching the dancers and the pounding, grimacing orchestra; Susan Lewis knew that, in his mind, he was seeing again that ring in the rain, and the blow-blotched body of the man who at least had kept his share of the promise and had never come to see Susan again.

"Look here," he said. His hand went forth and took her wrist. "Henri's always beaten me, and he's beaten me now, although—" he tried to smile at her—"I'm here with you, and he isn't—" He stopped and lit a cigarette, took two drags from it, then crushed and twisted it out.

"YOU see," he told her, staring constantly and white-faced now, "I'm not just certain what happened there, that is as fas as myself went. Because I thought it was going to be the end, finally, and I hoped that it would be. But there were so many old memories; that's always been his trouble, and mine, that we never could forget, even from the time when we were kids. . .

"There, in that ring, as the first of the rain came down and I unconsciously stared up at it, and he hit me—fairly enough, of course—I remembered the time he and I first fought, in the old stable at home. And how finally he didn't fight my way, and clawed and pulled hair, gave me *la savate* and booted me smack into the oats barrel. Then I remembered how he came to see me in Tours, in the prison, about two or three days before they all thought they were going to take me out and shoot me . . . And I told myself that he'd won again there, in his own way. So I went out and after him, more than ever, to try to whip him, in my fashion."

Howard Mays smiled. It was a grimace of dislike and bitter self hatred. He stretched out his big hands over the table and looked at them. "I hit him with both of these, with all they had, and all I had. Still, I couldn't beat him. He took it, and came in after me, his fashion, and my fashion.

"Then I slipped, and went down; really slipped. And he came at me, thinking I was up again. And—" his eyes were fully met with Susan's staring eyes— "what I can't decide even in this moment is just what did happen. I mean, whether I slipped again, involuntarily, when I tried to get up, or, somewhere in the back of my brain, told myself to make the motion of rising, of coming clear from the canvas, and then purposefully staying down, so that he would foul me, and I would win." He lifted his head up and this time he did laugh. "Now you know," he said. "There it all is."

"I don't believe you," Susan said. "And, even if I did, I don't see how it would make any difference. It doesn't, at least, to me. You aren't even certain yourself, that you purposefully allowed yourself to stay down."

"It matters to me," Howard Mays said. "And nothing else does. Because I know that Henri has doubts about what I did; I think that he at least partly believes I didn't really win—and have no right here beside you now. That's why. . ." He broke off and shrugged one wide shoulder.

SUSAN gravely smiled. "Don't worry about that; I understand. I'm young enough yet, plenty, not to worry about marriage, and if you can't decide pretty soon, or if I can't decide about you—you acting and feeling this way, why there are a number of others. So, let's talk and think of something else."

"I can't," Howard Mays said hoarsely. "Not for one moment. Not until I've found him and seen what he really does think about it. He's been gone almost a year now, and no one has heard from him, or anything about him. I don't think he's dead, though, and I do think I can find him. If I don't, at least I know of a place now

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where I can make another try at finding myself. . . Shucks!" He held his hand so strongly against the table edge that his knuckle joints showed white through the browned skin. "I'm even beginning to doubt my own courage, or that I ever really had any, and getting to believe that I am a coward."

"You just want to fight again," Susan Lewis said.

"I'll always want to fight."

"Yes, I believe you will. That's instinctive in your nature and in Henri's nature. The greatest tragedy in both your and his life has been the fact that there has not been enough actual, serious fighting to fully occupy you. The world, since the War, has become too civilized for you. You should have lived in the Old Man's, your grandfather's time; he had the country, and the opportunity for big scale fighting, and all he wanted of it."

"I've just found a place where I think I can get some," Howard Mays said. "That's one big reason why I've talked to you this way tonight; this other thing can't go on—me sitting around and chewing my fingernails and bedeviling you, when I'm the only one to settle my problem, and there's only one way."

"Can you tell me," Susan said, "a little bit about that way?"

"No." He was able to smile again. "Not until it's over; not until I've found Henri, or found out for myself. Then I'll—come right back, or send that cousin of mine back."

"All right," Susan said. She was gathering up her bag and gloves and cloak. "You can take me home now then. There's somebody I want to talk to, right away; I can't always be going about with you two men, as a kind of absent treatment camp-follower. . ."

Howard Mays had come to his feet, stood right over her now and staring down into her eyes. "Not somebody," he said, "that you might think you could fall in love with? Because Henri, if not I—"

"No, silly!" Susan said. She took one of his hands and squeezed it tightly. "It's nothing but about a job, a real job. I'm just sick of sitting around, on the sidelines. A little action would do me good, myself."

Howard Mays's eyes lighted and widened. "I'd like to see you in some real action some time," he said.

"Don't be too surprised," Susan told him softly, "if you do, then. Now, though, take me home; that's where I start. . ."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DESERT.

THE way of the meeting again between Howard Mays and his cousin, Henri de la Goustier, was as strange as most things had been in their lives. But, oddly, neither of them was greatly surprised when it arrived. For, always, Henri had believed since he had come South to the French Camel Corps and the Saharan desert, that he would meet his cousin once more here if for no other reason than that this vast, yet half-unexplored and unknown region of sun and sand, the place the native Berbers and Touaregs called the "Land of the Sword," was the last real arena of constant fighting in the world. Here, a man made and kept his own frontiers, and his life was an unceasing struggle.

BARON VON GRAEMER

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Also, beyond all else, Henri still considered his cousin to be a real fighting man, one who would seek the thrill and surge of combat and unbridled existence until the day he met death. And the man who informed Henri that his cousin was in the Land of the Sword, fully and unmistakably identified his presence there to him, used just those words. "He is a real fighting man, *Sidi*. Perhaps—" the narrator, a huge Senegalese who had been a sergeant of *tirailleurs* in France, paused— "perhaps even as fine a fighting man as yourself."

Sitting in the cool shadows of his quarters, stretched out wide-legged in a low chair while an Arab slave boy slowly pulled the big punkah matting creaking to and fro over his head, Henri de la Goustier laughed. "You mean that as high praise, then, hey, Bakna?" he asked in French.

Bakna sat cross-legged on the hard-packed dirt floor. He wore only a cheap cotton Araba *gandoura* and that was torn and made ragged by weeks of desert fighting and marching. But, around his throat on a leather thong and held in a little case of antelope hide like an amulet against his massive chest, was his French War Cross which he had won while serving in Henri de la Goustier's company of riflemen on the Western Front. "I've seen them, *Sidi*," he said calmly, "I've seen them all. And he is at least among the best."

"So," Henri answered in the slow, contemplative fashion the desert man affected. For a moment he rose and moved to the door, looked out across the sun-gleaming sand of the parade ground at the low, square buttresses of Fort Polignac, one of France's southernmost and most isolated posts in the desert, on the borders of the strange and always dangerous Touareg area of the Ahaggar and only a couple of hundred kilometers from the vague frontier of Italian Tripolitania.

A few camelmen and beasts, members of his squadron of the Camel Corps and the ones who had brought in Bakna, the ex-sergeant of *tirailleurs*, found him in the desert far to the west and saved him from a slow death from thirst, were still in the fierce sunlight, the drivers under the care of a non-com unloading and tending to the tired and galled animals.

"Where did you meet him, Bakna?" he asked quietly. "Out there in the Western *bled?*"

"Yes, *Sidi*." Bakna took the cigarette he had just been given by his old captain and rolled it in his fingers, looking up at the other man. "There in the *bled* . . ." He drew back his thick lips and smiled, showing his teeth, filed to points in his tribal fashion, his eyes steady in scrutiny. Henri de la Goustier was dressed in the simple style and uniform of the Camel Corps. He wore a short white jacket underneath which was the vest of red and gold buttons, and the wide, loose native trousers, and upon his feet the wide native *nayels*, broad soles made of the neck hide of the antelope. His only European article of clothing and the only sign of his rank beside the quality of his garments themselves was the azure-banded *kepi* with its gilt emblem of the Moslem crescent which he had put upon his head when he had risen from his chair. In his slow, exact scrutiny, it was not hard for the old Senegalese to see this man's cousin as he had last glimpsed him, dressed also in the loose, easy garments of the desert fighting man. "I am sure of it now, *Sidi*," Bakna said; "having the honor to see you again."

HENRI turned from the doorway and came back into the room, sat down in his chair and stretched out, as though fully at his ease. "What is he doing there in the *bled*, my cousin?" he asked, watching Bakna's lined, dark face with a sidewise glance.

The old Senegalese, who had seen wars all his life, lifted up and out his hand, made a symbolic and quick gesture with it. "He is a warrior," he said. "Leading warriors. More than that . . ."

"Go on," said Henri; he was sitting up and forward in his chair.

"*Sidi*, I cannot," Bakna said. "That man, your cousin, saved my life. If it had not been for him, I would not be here."

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From his short jacket, Henri took out his cigarette case of gazelle leather, proffered it to Bakna, then lit the two cigarettes. In the eddying of the air from the punkah motions, the smoke rose and fell in waves. Through the silence the two men allowed to be maintained between them, they now could hear the far cries of camels, the thirsty, exhausted ones with whom Bakna had just come in from the desert, being led to water and pasture. Then Henri spoke. "You know what I do here, Bakna, you know my purpose?"

"Yes, *Sidi.*" Bakna lifted his eyes to look squarely at him. "You are bringing peace to the desert, where there was never peace before."

"It is good you know that. Because few men do."

"Man cannot go on killing his brother forever," Bakna said. He spoke slowly, remembering all the far and foreign countries he had seen since he first had left his own jungle river in Senegal, calling back memories of France during the Great War, and Germany right afterwards, where he and his comrades of the Senegalese rifle companies had served in the French forces of occupation. "The world has got too small," he admitted, "for men to go on like that. The old ways cannot last, even here."

"You will answer me one question, then, Bakna?"

The old black man stirred a little, uneasily, in his cross-legged position, and blinked his eyes, as though the unaccustomed cigarette smoke bothered them. "One alone, *Sidi;* yes."

"Then the name of this cousin of mine, his name here in the desert, among all the tribes, is El Mafoud; is it not? That is how he is called?"

"Yes, *Sidi,*" Bakna had let a long moment of silence fall in before he spoke. "That is so."

"I know of that man then," Henri said in calmness. "He is the white man who has grown almost legendary in the *bled,* the white man whom even the Touareg and the Reguibat fear. And the *harka,* the big war party he leads, is composed nearly entirely of white men—renegades like himself." He paused and looked at Bakna, but the Senegalese did not answer him, sat in stolid and perfect silence.

HENRI smiled slightly at him. "We both know these things," he said. "I will just say them aloud to you so that no man will ever be able to tell you that you told them to me. . . The man called El Mafoud, my cousin, joined the *Tercio Extranjero,* the Spanish Foreign Legion, about three years ago. About two years ago, after the change in Spain from monarchy to the republic, and the practical collapse of all of Spain's colonial African forces, he deserted from the *Tercio.* That is, he left, without finishing out his prescribed enlistment period.

"But he did not leave Africa. And since then he has constantly sought and found the fighting he did not get in the Spanish Legion. He organized this *harka* of his. He formed it of renegades, deserters from the French Legion and the Spanish, a few picked Berbers, mountain men from the Tafilet region who had fought with Abd el Krim against the French, Reguibats who knew all the desert trails between the Atlas Mountains in Morocco to the Congo.

"He armed those men and led them; he does to this day. He has made the whole central Sahara region his territory of operations. So far, though, he has only specialized in one sort of job: he has raided the *rezzou,* the war caravans who come down from the North, from the Tafilet and Algeria to raid slaves in the Congo and even in Senegal and Gambia, then run those slaves north, sell them on the Mediterranean coast to the buyers who in their turn ship them and sell them in the big slave markets in Arabia. The man known as El Mafoud has made his fame, and his quite considerable fortune, raiding those *rezzou,* then selling those slaves back to their own tribes—for a good price, and thus buying more rifles and machine-guns and faster camels, making himself a bigger power in the desert every day. . ."

Henri stopped and stared into a corner,

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where his beautiful camel saddle rested, made of red leather with a flexible cross pommel, the date when it was made and the name of the maker inscribed upon it in black Arabic characters. Above it, on the mat-covered wall, close at hand, hung his Ross .30-.30 rifle, banded in silver in the native style, and with a telescopic sights attachment, his binoculars and his automatic, all his field equipment.

"LAST year, at Geneva," he went on to Bakna, "the League of Nations convention declared the slave trade to be bigger than it has been in a hundred years. We here have received orders to do all we can to stop it, as has every post from the Niger to the Mediterranean. I tell you also now that we have just as pressing orders to stop the activities of this man known as El Mafoud; more, to capture him and all his *harka*.

"They are by far the best equipped, armed and led independent force in the desert. Their work—" he smiled a little bit, bleakly— "of raiding the slave-raiders and returning the prisoners for a price back to their own tribes, is not really a bad one; any man should be willing to pay a price for the safe return of his brother or neighbor from perpetual slavery. But this *harka* of El Mafoud must be stopped; it is composed nearly entirely of men whom two European governments seek as renegades, and it is the greatest potential if not actual source of bloodshed and disorder in the Sahara. . . You understand me, Bakna?"

"I understand you fully, *Sidi*."

"That is good. . . Because the patrol of my men, who found you, were out seeking contact with the *harka* of El Mafoud when they picked you up. And you, in your turn, had been caught in Senegal with a lot of your tribe by the Arab slave-raiders. But, you had the courage and the wits to break loose from your chains and grab a water *guerba*, and sneak off in the night—and venture death from thirst in the desert before you got here or to Fort Flatters at Temassinin. My patrol found you, if they did not find El Mafoud, and that in itself is luck. Because you have seen El Mafoud, down in the Senegal, when he has come to barter back men taken from the tribes in other raids, and you know of him, know his ways."

"I have answered your one question, *Sidi*."

HENRI made a sharp motion with one hand. "That is not enough, Bakna. You know, you have heard, at least vaguely, of all we are trying to do here in Africa. You know of the great railway which has already been mapped out, from Colomb Bechar on the Southern border of Morocco right down to the Congo. You know what that will do for all of Africa.

"You have also been in Europe; you have seen France and Germany. You know that those countries must expand, must get out from Europe, send their young, strong people forth as colonists, to new homes and new jobs they cannot get in Europe, or else there will be war, and always war. That railway from Colomb Bechar will be the first step; it will draw all of Northern and Central French Africa together, make it one. But, that is not possible as long as men like El Mafoud and his fighters ride the desert, raiding and killing where they please."

Bakna had got to his feet. He stood frowning and balancing from one foot to the other, looking down briefly at his ankles, where the slave chains had galled marks he would wear all the rest of his life.

"*Sidi*," he said at last, "a man is a man and a warrior is a warrior. You know me. . . You, you and I," his fingers rose up momentarily and touched the little sweat-stained leathern case holding his treasured War Cross, "we have fought side by side. I will fight with you now; I will go with you anywhere, and do anything that you command me, because you are a real *Sidi*, and I once served as your sergeant of company. Or you can put me *en prison* over there in the fort, in one of those little rooms where there is no sunlight and only a little air, and bars on the windows and doors, but I cannot tell you any more than

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I have told you now. Because that man, your cousin, is a real warrior and a real *Sidi*, also."

In his chair, Henri sat straight and smiled at him. "You, too, are a warrior," he said. "Perhaps—I'm not certain—it will be better this way." He got from the chair and crossed the room, went to a foot-locker against the far wall, opened it and took from it a bottle of brandy. He pulled the cork with his teeth, held it out. "Drink," he said. "Forget all the precepts of Mahomet about alcohol and take a good, big swig. You're alive, and if those men of mine hadn't found you, the vultures and the jackals would have had you in another ten hours."

"Luck, *Sidi*," Bakna said, holding up the bottle. "I hope that you two, you and that one, El Mafoud, may meet, and soon. But not sword to sword, but as friends, as cousins."

"*Insallah*," Henri de la Goustier said, using the Mohammedan expression. "Let the luck tell that. . ."

THE desert night had come down, black, sharp and cool, and Bakna slept in a corner, his knees drawn up under him, when Henri straightened up from the chair where he had been sitting and smoking an endless chain of cigarettes. Fifty yards away, he had been able to recognize the slapping of his orderly's bare, flat feet over the dry earth of the parade ground.

The orderly, an old man of the Chaamba tribe whose rheumatism and wounds kept him from the desert patrols any more, saluted silently and held out the yellow, official radiogram.

"Wait!" Henri commanded him, his voice not quite calm. He took out his lighter and flicked it on, stretched the message flat so he could read in the lighter's blue-yellow flame.

It was from the North, from Headquarters: "Urgent Priority—T O 2811 KY—Harka El Mafoud Reported Sixty Rifles Leaving Djouf Direction Tripolitanian Border Fourth June Stop Private Plane from Marrakesh Reported Trouble Taoudeni Stop Now On Way To Flatters Stop Situation In Your Hands Report Size Mobile Operative Forces At Once."

At his side, the old orderly started and nearly jumped back; in the three years he had served with him, he had never heard the captain whistle. Henri de la Goustier laughed at him, reaching in through the door for his *kepi* and burnous, for the night was cold. "Tell Sergeant Izeil to report to me at once at the radio room. Then have my two camels brought right here, in front of my quarters. *Vite!* Let's see you run!"

His own pace across the parade ground towards the main gate of the fort and the little, one story radio building was a very swift walk, but bow-legged and bald-headed old Izeil, his senior sergeant, was there before him.

"It is business, *Sidi?*" he asked, unable to stop from grinning.

"Business," Henri told him. "With El Mafoud. How many of the best camels are out at pasture; not more than forty?"

"Just forty, *Sidi*."

"All right, we'll ride them out tonight; two platoons. I'll let you pick the men. But I want two men as guides who know the Iguidi country and the region between there and the Djouf better than they know their own mothers. I'll be there to inspect the camels as soon as you bring them in; ten pack beasts and the two Vickers guns, with a thousand rounds. Issue out two hundred rounds of rifle ammunition to each man, and bring along half a case of grenades and two rocket pistols. This man thinks he's a real desert fighter, Izeil."

"The *Sidi* will let me say," Izeil asked in a soft voice, "that a lot of men have thought that?"

Henri shook his head, unsmiling. "This man is," he said. "I have very good reason to know it. . . Tell Sergeant Aghdar I'll be with him to ration out the supplies, as soon as I'm through here. Understood?"

"Understood, *Sidi!*"

"Good!" He snapped back the sergeant's flaring salute and went on, through

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the broad cube of light from the radio room door.

CHAPTER IX.

OUT OF THE SKY.

THE forty *mehara*, the long necked and legged, fleet riding camels, rested prone upon their front knees in a perfect alignment, the ten laden pack animals behind them in a solid group. Beside each beast, tall and oddly imposing in their long white military burnouses, their red ammunition bandoleers strapped flatly across their chest, their Lebel carbines slung from their shoulders, the keen, nervously rigid Chaamba troopers stood at attention facing Henri de la Goustier.

His orderly held his own graceful, white female Ahaggar camel behind him at the kneeling position, one hand tightly upon the braided headstall, the captain's Ross rifle in the saddle boot, the red saddle, famous already in the Corps, cinched tightly in place.

Henri was dressed almost identically as his men, in the long, loose, white military burnous, and with the *chesh*, the long, soft cloth which served as both veil and head cloth against the desert sun and sandy wind, wrapped around his head, bare-footed except for the broad-soled *nayels*, but with his Ruby automatic slung at his right hip, his high-power binoculars around his neck. He had just finished speaking to the men, telling them of their purpose and of his ambition, his personal hope, to meet, and to fight with and to conquer the man known as El Mafoud and the most dreaded raider in the Great Desert. Speaking, he had briefly eyed one man at the end of the line, old Bakna, the Senegalese ex-sergeant of *tirailleurs*, now dressed in Chaamba robes and standing stiffly before a Corps camel, his *chesh* pulled high over his face as yet to hide his features from the surprised gaze of the other *meharistes*.

"You have heard me," Henri de la Goustier told them. "You—I have waited a long time for this. Now, it seems that El Mafoud is coming right to us, to have it out, settle it with us, if we will not settle it with him. That is all. Now, we will—"

The sound was so loud and sudden that the kneeling camels started and whinnied, struggling against the head-ropes, trying to break loose and away in their fright. Staring up, all of them saw the plane when it was no more than a hundred feet above the wild parade ground, rolling in a wing bank before its pilot brought it into the wind for its landing slant. Its cabin was lighted; Henri could see into it, as, after the pilot had put the neat little monoplane down in an excellent three-point landing on a field fringed with struggling camels and cameleers, the machine rolled up to stop right in front of him.

The door opened in the fuselage side and the one other occupant got out from beside the pilot, jumped nimbly down despite the clumsiness of the big flying suit and the strapped parachute. But even before the goggles and the helmet were ripped off, Henri, with a slow but violently deep kind of rage he did not then yet fully understand, had recognized Susan Lewis.

"I LOVE the trousers, Henri," she said. "But I hoped you'd be wearing boots, soft red boots, with gold embroidery on them, the kind the caids and sheikhs wear in Marrakesh. I am, though, awfully glad to see you. . ."

"I might send for a pair of the boots," he told her after he had taken both her hands. But he was looking past her, at the man who was expertly making the plane fast, securing it with lanyards and stakes, cutting off the motor and the cabin and sidelights. Then, to her, "This is one of the last places I expected to see you."

She stood gazing fully up at him, brown-faced from her weeks of the African sun and wind, slim and lovely, more lovely than ever. "I could," she said very softly to him, "say that that is why you came here. But, truly, that is not my reason. Now, let me present to you the Baron Von Graemer."

The Baron Von Graemer was a small

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man, broad-shouldered and powerful, with a jagged scar line that ran down all one side of his face and a monocle which he put in place as soon as he took his flying goggles off. He bowed to Henri and gave him a strong, hard hand. "I am sorry to so bother you, Captain," he said in clear English. "But my colleague, Miss Lewis, here, insisted that we land here, and land tonight."

"The Baron," Susan Lewis said rapidly, "is a scientist. He is interested in ancient civilizations, and has been attached to the Royal Museum at Cairo for years. I am associated with him in that work; I have been working for several of the museums in the States—practically ever since I saw you last. We are here not to bother the French Colonial government or the Camel Corps and its captains, but to look over those old rock carvings and paintings that Professors Reygasse and Gautier found last year, south of here. You remember their being here, Henri?"

"I was here; yes," Henri said. "But I thought they got all there was to be had."

The Baron Von Graemer smiled at Susan Lewis, and she smiled back at him. "We hope not, Captain," he said. "That is far from here, where they found those things?"

"Not actually far," Henri said in a low, harsh voice. "Really only about fifty miles from here. But, it is right out in the *bled,* in wild desert country. Not a place for any Europeans, especially a European woman, to spend any time unguarded. This region is really unsettled, or—" his smile was bleak and quick—"we wouldn't be stationed here. But I imagine you have permission from Paris?"

"I will show you my papers and letters immediately, Captain," Von Graemer told him. "But, you are in a hurry?"

"Not that much," Henri said slowly. "Show me your papers, if you please, and then I will see what I can do about giving you quarters. I am going," he was looking fully at Susan, now, "out on patrol, and shall probably be gone for several days, so you may occupy my personal quarters, right behind here. As for you, Baron, I'll see what one of my lieutenants can do for you, in the post. You will excuse me, while I examine these papers?"

The Baron Von Graemer and his gear had been installed in the small room of a rather grouchy and still half sleepy young lieutenant of the squadron, and Henri de la Goustier had seen that he had cigarettes, liquor and drinking water, before he crossed the parade ground again and rapped upon the door of his own quarters. Susan Lewis opened it to him at once.

SHE had washed and changed while he had been occupied at the post, wore wide-trousered pajamas now and a patterned blue silk dressing gown which in the lamp light made her hair seem an actual corn color.

"Come in," she said, "and sit down, in your own chair there. I can't quite get over you yet, in a burnous and a headcloth. But I remember that one time I did ask you for a drink and cigarette, and got them."

"I can't get any sherry this time," Henri told her. "The best I can do is brandy, and a cigarette."

"Just a cigarette then," she said, going to sit on a smaller, straighter chair near his favorite one. "When are you planning to leave, right away?"

"As soon as I can," he said, holding out his cigarette case.

"What is it, Henri, more war?"

He studied her for a long and somehow tense moment before he answered. "Not quite," he said then. "Just another fight—between cousins, only on a good deal bigger scale than before. I'm going out to find Howie Mays and bring him in, even if I have to kill him and all the other renegades he's got with him."

Slowly, very calmly, Susan Lewis said, "I know that. That's one reason I came. . . . I saw Howard over near that big salt lake of the Djouf, at Taoudeni. That fact, I imagine, that he had been there, was in your orders to you; it must have been. Because he told me, right in front of Baron Von Graemer, and the Sheikh of Taoudeni,

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that he was coming here, to see me again, and see you. And the Baron wirelessed that north."

For the space of several seconds, Henri stood very still. Then he laughed aloud, harshly. "We've always thought we were going to end it," he said. "Finally, though, I think we will, this time. . . Good night, Susan, and good luck, you and your Baron. . ."

"Henri!" she said. She was up off her chair and right in front of him, grasping him hard by one arm. "That monocled German is no more to me than the pair of sandals you've got on. Do you think that —if he were—I'd be here, like this? But, you went one way, and then Howie went another, leaving me all alone again. And I had to fill my life somehow, find something to occupy my time. And—I'm being perhaps all too frank with you—I never yet have found a man I thought I could love, except you two wild men, yourself and Howard Mays. . . But must you go out there into the *bled* now, with your troopers, and trap him from behind some dune, rake him down with machine-gun lead?"

"Unless he surrenders himself and comes in peacefully, he, and all the men with him. Those are the orders I just got from the north."

"And you can't or won't change them?"

"Not at all; not for one minute. . . Good night, Susan, and, again, good luck."

"Good night," she said faintly, white-lipped, motionless, as he stepped through and then shut the door.

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S WAY.

FROM that night, steadily, for three weeks, Henri de la Goustier and his forty troopers of the Camel Corps sought his cousin, Howard Mays, and the men who followed and fought with him. Henri's guides were among the best in the desert, he himself knew the region between Tripolitania, the Sudan and Timbuktu as well as any man, but in his scouring of it he found no trace, even faint or old, of a *harka* of the size and fighting power that his cousin led. Across the burning track, marching all day and sometimes during the late, cooler hours of the night, he went from well to well, eagerly and bitterly, and to miss every time.

At last, at the Oglats of Madi, he stopped and held a conference with his sergeants, old Izeil and Aghdar, and the Senegalese, Bakna, who, the Camel Corps men had found during the last few weeks, surprisingly knew this desert just about as well as any man.

"He is not here," Henri admitted to the three where they crouched about him, their *chesh* drawn high about their mouths and eyes in the awful midday sun. "We have missed him somehow and he has got around us. Either that, or he has gone back towards the Djouf and far to the west, well beyond our territory."

He looked behind him. The camels and the men of the squadron lay there, equally exhausted. Many of the best beasts suffered from saddle sores and from infected feet, lacerated and swollen in the swift, unflinching passage over the rocky, broken ground they had covered in the last weeks. And in the shadow made for them by the stretching of burnouses across several camel sticks stuck in the sand, several of the younger men lay flat, mumbling and twitching with the fever and dysentery brought on by the bad water, the heat and monotonous diet of the desert journey; one of them, probably two of them, might readily die before they were returned to the care of the *infirmier* at Fort Polignac. Old Bakna raised one bent hand and coughed mildly behind it.

"So?" Henri asked him.

"The *Sidi* has not thought," Bakna said in his slow but correct French, "that this El Mafoud might not have swung in, behind us, and gone right towards the fort, or to Tadjenout?"

"Tadjenout!" Old Izeil clapped one hand against his thigh and laughed. "A Senegalese, a *tirailleur*, is trying to tell desert men. Why there is nothing at Tad-

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jenout except rock walls and sand, and some of the old *tiniraf* markings and paintings on the rock. And do you think, black one, that this El Mafoud, no matter how tough he thinks he is, would throw himself into the barbwire and machine-guns of the fort? He has never once attacked a French post, anyhow, no matter what else he might have done."

"I do not say, I only ask," reminded Bakna. "But, there is more now than sand and rock walls at Tadjenout; the *Sidi* himself can tell us that."

"You mean those two, the man and the woman," said Henri de la Goustier, his sore eyes narrowed and glittering, "who came to the fort in the plane. You mean that they may have gone out to Tadjenout. Although I gave orders they were to stay *en poste*, close by the fort, until I returned."

"I do not know, *Sidi*," Bakna said again. "I only ask."

"*Manarf!*" Henri said in Arabic. "Enough! Get them up—Izeil—Aghdar. We ride! If El Mafoud is the man the desert says he is, we'll see him yet."

IT was dark, and the desert moon was just beginning to rise when Henri, leading his column and following after his point men fifty or sixty kilometers from Fort Polignac, met his cousin Howard Mays. The moon was clear and gave light to the desert, but somehow the usually keen-eyed point men had missed Howard Mays. For he rose from a fold in the sand at the shoulder of a dune not more than seventy-five yards away from where Henri rode alone, the rest of the column in a solid body some little distance behind, and, holding his rifle at his hip, called out in a low voice.

"How are you, Henri?" he said.

Henri de la Goustier wheeled his big Ahaggar mount and reached for the Ross rifle in his saddle boot. But Howard Mays said distinctly to him, "Don't, Henri; I've got you covered, and I'd just have to shoot you through the shoulder. My men are all around, back of those dunes there, and if you start shooting, so will they—I wouldn't be able to stop them, and they've got Thompson and Vickers guns."

Henri nudged his camel with his off knee, sent the beast around in a sloping walk. He rode right up to Howard Mays, both his hands in full sight upon his saddle pommel and far away from either his automatic at his hip or the rifle in the boot at his knee.

"You give me the chance, anyhow," he said then, "to tell you just what I think of you. First of all, you're a liar; my flankers would have come across your men if they were here behind the dunes, and would have given the alarm before this. And, even if they were, my men are in sufficient position to deploy at once, without any great casualties, and smear your collection of two-franc cutthroats. Tell me, though: how does it feel to be a deserter?"

Howard Mays's lean and lined face had already settled into the immobility of a mask. "Not so well," he said. "We had no regular rations for months, we had no boots, and the ammunition they gave us wouldn't fit our rifles, or was duds—our officers were scheming and fighting among themselves, blowing their own and each others' brains out, before we had enough sense to desert. But I didn't come here to tell you that, Henri. I came here to tell you to watch yourself, and what's going on at Tadjenout. You understand me?"

"No," Henri de la Goustier began, "I—" Leaning out, he made a swift reaching movement for the muzzle of the Savage rifle the other held. Laughing, Howard Mays wheeled clear from him. "All right," he told Henri. "I thought you wouldn't, and that's why I came. I saw Susan for a few minutes at Taoudeni, but she always was a hard girl to convince, and she seems to be harder than ever now. *Au revoir*, Henri, and remember what I said!"

KICKING with his bare heels, Howard Mays sent his big roan she-camel in long strides backwards up the slope of the dune, but so he still faced his cousin and the muzzle of his rifle was always on his cousin's chest. "You—" Henri began

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again, almost inarticulate with anger and self-hatred at his inability to do anything.

"No, don't bother," Howard Mays called down to him just before, at the shelter of the dune ridge, he turned to ride from sight. "I'll be seeing you again, and it will be soon."

"Alone! Make it alone!" Henri de la Goustier called up at him. "Or any way you wish!"

"Alone, then!" Howard Mays called back, and then was gone, a hooded, dim and nearly spectral figure.

When Izeil and Aghdar, his sergeants, caught up with him with the column at their heels, Henri did nothing but open one hand out flat in a sign of denial. "It was nothing," he said in answer to their silent stares. "A *goumier*, a man of the Iguidi who has been serving in the militia up at Fort Flatters and has finished his time and is riding home now.

"He passed by our point men, and came in to identify himself, before his tracks were picked up and he was mistakenly shot in the back."

Izeil made a clucking sound in his throat and scratched one hairy arm. "*Allah!*" he muttered. "They let those men in the *goum* up at Flatters ride fine beasts . . ."

"Get them going!" Henri snapped at him. "I don't want to pass another day out here."

THE young lieutenant of the Camel Corps whom he had left in charge of the post was apologetic to begin with when Henri got back and interviewed him, and red in the face and sweating with embarrassment when he got through.

"So you let a woman," Henri told him, "talk you out of what little sense you were born with . . ."

"*Mais, mon capitaine—*" said the twenty-two year old lieutenant who had asked for a transfer from the Spahis to the Camel Corps in the belief that he would find more action and real desert life there, and as yet had not been allowed by his captain to lead one raid alone, even fire a single shot. "It was not the young lady only. No . . . She is lovely enough, that is so, but she did not try her charms on me. She used logic, any number of arguments. And that man who accompanies her, *M'sieur le Baron*, he has all those papers, from the Minister of Colonies, and the Khedive of Egypt, the Museum at Paris, the Ambassador at Berlin. Of course, to him, I repeated your orders.

"But she went out and started the plane herself, threw the mooring lines off, ran it up and down the field. And then all too suddenly that man, the Baron, ran from where he had been standing beside me, right at the main gate out there, and leapt up into the plane, and she flew off. I did not think it would be sensible to shoot at them with a machine-gun, under the circumstances, and they said they were only going to go to Tadjenout. And, after all, there is nothing but those old rock carvings and pictures there, and no harm that they could do, really . . . Since then, of course, I have sent a detail out there under a corporal, to watch them and see how they are, and he has reported back that they are all right, have found an old well from which they get water, and are busy making photographs and copies of that old scribbling on the rocks."

"All right." Almost paternally, Henri de la Goustier touched him on the shoulder. "I have known the young lady for a long time, and she has got her way from older and wiser men than yourself . . . What have been the wireless reports in the last few days?"

The lieutenant, smiling again, opened a desk drawer and brought forth a file, from it took a sheaf of yellow radio forms. "At fourteen hours yesterday," he read from one, "the Sudanese post reported that native agents have brought in the information that there has been a quite considerable movement among the Touaregs. A *rezzou* of about a hundred rifles has left, in the direction of the Iguidi country and Italian territory. Probably the usual thing, a raid over into Tripolitania, against the Iguidi on Italian soil, then back again, with a few flintlocks and camels and women."

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"Let them raid, then, if that's where they're going," Henri said. "Let the Italian Corps take care of them, in their own territory. It's a long time since the Touaregs lacked enough sense to tangle with us. I'm going to bed. I wish to be called right after *reveille*. I want a detail of ten men ready to ride with me to Tadjenout. Inscribe the name of that old Senegalese, Bakna, on the squadron rolls as a *goumier*, a militiaman holding a temporary corporal's warrant. See that the *infirmier* does a thorough looking-over on those two sick men we brought in, and that the vet takes care of those beasts' feet and sores. Good night, and remember that you're not the first man to be made a fool by a woman . . ."

"Yes, sir!" the lieutenant mumbled, and stared as his captain went stiff-legged out the door.

CHAPTER XI.

VON GRAEMER STRIKES.

THE first lilac and silver lights of the dusk were climbing up from the horizon against the white sun shimmer of the sky when Henri de la Goustier came riding at the head of his detail of ten men down into the shallow Valley of Tadjenout. For a moment, pulling up his mount at the edge of the billowing descent of sandy rock between the rugged walls of schist, he paused and cursed, for the red-winged monoplane was nowhere in the valley below. But then he saw the conical, well-placed tent, the thin blue streaking of a cooking fire and a white-clad figure which he at once recognized as that of Susan Lewis, and he tapped his camel on the neck, rode quickly on down.

Susan Lewis was beside the small cooking fire of old *thalla* tree roots when he reached her. She was dressed in white pongee silk, close-fitting jacket and widely flared riding breeches, her slim, long legs encased in soft leather field boots. She expertly balanced a skillet and a frying pan over the slow sputter of the flames and was cooking several wide slabs of antelope steak. "Just in time for supper, Henri," she told him. "How was your junket off in the *bled?*"

Henri de la Goustier did not answer her for a moment, turned to let his searching gaze rest upon the little camp and then upon the face of Bakna, who, to the envy of the whole post at Polignac, he had placed in charge of the detail he had brought with him. To Bakna he made a sign, to water, to feed and hobble the camels, then see that the men were fed and sentries stationed on the crests of the valley above the sheer if low walls of schist on each side.

Then to her he said, "Fairly satisfactory. I met my cousin, and found out to my own satisfaction that he is the man using the name of El Mafoud and a deserter from the Spanish Legion. But where's the big scientist, the Baron Von Graemer, and the plane you flew away without permission from Polignac?"

Susan Lewis turned the antelope steaks over for the last time in the pan, put the pan down on the sand and covered it. "Did you come just to ask questions like these?" she asked him.

"That's one of my reasons; you didn't stay at Polignac long enough for me to do it there."

"All right; I'll answer you, then. We're practically through with our work here. After all, it was only in the beginning to more or less check up on the work done by Gautier and Reygasse, the two Algerian professors who were in here last year. There are hundreds of paintings and carvings over there, of a giraffe, and of all kinds of animals these old people hunted here. It proves that all this country was once lush in vegetation, full of flowers and trees and grass. A wealthy, flowering, rich place.

"Those old people had chariots drawn by four and by eight horses, and they had implements made out of pure gold. That is one thing Baron Von Graemer and myself discovered, that the other men missed last year. The traces of an entire lost civilization are in this area. Baron Von Graemer says there are a great deal more, all over here. He says that gold from this

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region, lost now to anybody's knowledge, was brought in barter north to Egypt and the courts of the Pharaohs.

"He has gone off in the plane searching from the air for more valleys and probable ancient sites like this one. He says they must be all around here, and as far as several hundred kilometers over what is now the Italian frontier. Of course, he knows a great deal more about that, naturally, than I do; I'm only his assistant, and reporting for the museums in New York. I can't even read the old *tiniraf* writing."

"And he can," Henri de la Goustier said.

"Certainly!" She stared at him.

"Do you really trust him, the Baron?" he asked her.

SUSAN LEWIS laughed at him. "Not fully, although I'm holding two hungry people, you and me, from eating supper until he gets back from this survey of his. But are you worried, finally and really worried about me and my ability to take care of myself?"

He did not directly answer that, just looked away where Bakna had expertly made camp and a picket line, posted his sentries. But then he said, "Have you seen Howard Mays, since you last saw him at Taoudeni?"

"No, but I expect I will. He has a habit of appearing in my life unexpectedly and irregularly, just as you have. But you've not allowed me to answer your other question yet. Look." She pulled back the front of her jacket, so that he could see the small, neat automatic pistol there in its rubber shoulder holster. "And I sleep in the plane every night, with the door locked, from the inside, in this, your Land of the Sword."

He grunted a half audible curse word; to the east, from the direction of Tripolitania, the red-winged monoplane was swinging in, still a dark speck against the dusk-paled sky. "But you like danger, you like traveling around right with it, don't you?"

Susan Lewis gave him her grave and tender smile. "After having known you and Howard Mays all my life, why shouldn't I have picked up the habit, despite myself?"

"I can't answer that," he said. He was getting to his feet and moving away, to be near the camels with Bakna when the roaring plane landed in the narrow valley. Von Graemer, he saw, was perhaps the most consummate pilot he had ever watched: with absolute certainty and accuracy, he winged about low and flat over the valley, then straightened out, came back and settled the trim little ship down in a perfect three-point position. When he came forth from the cabin, lifting his goggles away and sliding his monocle up into place, he walked directly, as if without surprise, to Henri and held out his hand. "I'm glad to see you, Captain. Are you with us for supper?"

"Probably longer than that," Henri said in a flat voice. "You handle that plane very well."

The Baron Von Graemer shrugged a little bit. "I should. I flew with the brothers Von Richtofen all through the War. We were on opposite sides then, I guess, eh, Captain?"

"Yes," Henri said, hard-faced and glancing sidewise, "I guess we were."

THEY sat there cross-legged, the three of them, around the little fire of thorn wood and ate the simple but excellent supper Susan Lewis had prepared. They were almost through and the night had blackened out the sky to give white sharpness to the stars and closely encompass the fire light, when above them they heard one sentry challenging another, and then Bakna's voice. They were standing up, Henri with his hand upon the butt of his pistol, as Bakna came down through the valley towards them, an issue Lebel carbine in his hand, another man, dressed in the long and loose robes of a desert rider, walking before him.

"Bayeouf, who is on Number Three post, he and I found him, *Sidi*," Bakna said. "He was crawling through the sand, and we came right up on him from behind."

"All right, Bakna; *trés bien*. Go back up there now. Just leave him there." Henri

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took his glance from the old Senegalese and brought it to rest upon his cousin, Howard Mays. "What were you doing up there," he asked him low-voiced, "looking for *tiniraf* writing, too, or just a Lebel slug in the head?"

"You make it just a little bit too simple," Howard Mays said. "Here's the man I want to talk to—the Baron Von Graemer. He's the one who quite strangely resented my calling upon Susan and him when they made themselves guests of the Sheikh of Taoudeni over in the Djouf. He even wirelessed north about it, complained to the authorities and so had you sent out on some goofy chase into the desert after me, so that he could have his own good time to ram around here.

"How's the gold hunting, Baron, or are you really seriously interested in ancient civilization?"

The Baron Von Graemer did not let his expression change.

In a quiet voice, he said to Henri de la Goustier, "How much longer are you going to allow yourself to listen to this man, Captain?"

"Not for more than a minute," Henri said. "Speak quickly—El Mafoud!"

"That's the way I want to," said Howard Mays. "Von Graemer, here, was after *tiniraf* writing and symbols first, but then gold. And, I guess from the way he's been leaving this place alone the last few days and making trips off into the desert, all by himself, he must have found among the wall writings here, the old directions of how to get to those mines from which the ancient peoples got all their gold—the gold some of the Pharaohs had. Gold the Baron saw up in Egypt, in the Museum there. How about it, Baron?"

"You are something to laugh at, that is all," Von Graemer told him. "The famous outlaw and desert raider, caught crawling on his belly, like a lizard—"

"Swell, all right," Howard Mays said. "But, I'll bet you've got that plane loaded down with samples of gold and assays right now . . . I've got agents in Europe, too—me, the big desert raider. And they told me by radio a couple of days ago that you are tied in with a big gang of crooked international bankers and munitions manufacturers in Paris and Berlin and Copenhagen. If you were to fly out of here tonight, with those gold samples you've got in your plane, nobody could stop you, or stop what would very probably be international war. Because the whole world is after gold, and a lot of the mines I believe you've found are just on or across the Italian frontier, and your establishment of a privately operated gold field here would bring about serious international complications at once."

HOWARD MAYS stopped and smiled. He watched the Baron Von Graemer, gave a brief glancing look to his cousin and to Susan Lewis. "Of course, you're not taking any chances of the thing remaining unknown, or, worse, in proper French government hands, where it would expand and open up this whole area, as Captain de la Goustier has always wished it would do—create funds in time for irrigation projects and proper colonization of this whole area . . . You fixed it so Susan Lewis came along with you, because your connections are big enough to throw that much front, and you were smart enough to know that my cousin and I are in this territory, and would tumble to what you were after in a hurry.

"I already know, of course, and know, too, that you've got a *rezzou* of a hundred or so paid Touaregs right out there in the desert now, to take care of me and my lads, and any Camel Corps troopers that might be around, and to see that you get off all right for the north and Europe tonight . . . But I don't want to bore you any more with your own facts, Baron, and I would like to stop talking before the Captain or Miss Lewis calls me a liar. So, what do you say we go over there and take a look in that plane, and see if the supposed great scientist did bring back any gold from this last desert trip of his, or not."

Slowly and sidewise, eyeing Henri de la Goustier intently, Howard Mays began to move. "Stand still!" Henri ordered, his

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body rigid. Howard Mays had his hooked right ready, and swung it from his knee, instantly. But Henri had learned, and learned too much about his cousin's ability with his fists. He stepped right in and around that blow, caught Howard Mays on the point with a straight right that knocked him headlong, down and unconscious.

"The lesson," he started to say, "seems on the way to be comple—"

"Duck!" Susan Lewis said in a rapid, high voice, and Henri de la Goustier turned, trying to duck, if just a little too late. The bullet the Baron Von Graemer fired at him through the pocket of his coat caught him in the shoulder, ripped him around and down, shocked all but the dregs of sensibility from him. But, through the clouding and the blackness of the pain, he could see Von Graemer step in towards Susan Lewis as she reached for the little pistol in her shoulder holster, strike her lightly but sufficiently across the temples with his own gun, then grasp up her limp form and with it in his arms run for the monoplane.

HENRI DE LA GOUSTIER staggered to his knees. He tried to cry out, tried to paw up into firing position his big automatic. But from the rim of the narrow and shallow valley, on both sides, in immediate answer to that shot from Von Graemer's pistol, there was a clanging roar of fire, that of rifles broken through with the hysterical yammer of machine-guns.

Kneeling or prone there in the darkness, Bakna and his ten men were firing back as fast as they could pull triggers. Staggering on the sand, hearing the reaching wildness of the plane's motor as Von Graemer taxied it off and down the valley, Henri de la Goustier thickly laughed. His cousin, he thought strangely, his cousin who lay there flat, knocked out by his own blow, had been right for once, had, in his way, tried to teach him a lesson . . . Henri de la Goustier swayed on his knees, trying to talk to his cousin, then fell beside him.

It was perhaps twenty minutes later when Bakna, more startled and elated than he had been in years, came down into the valley where the two men lay, accompanied by a Russian who had once been a Captain in the Imperial Preobajenski Regiment.

The Russian had a canteen of water. While Bakna held Howard Mays up, he washed that man's face as the Englishman performed the same duty for Henri.

"Cousins," Bakna mumbled, not caring if anybody understood him, "cousins and never in a long and hard life have I ever seen any two men who can fight like them."

"They'll get plenty of that," the Russian told him, understanding part of it. "If they want to get out of here without taking sixty or seventy Touaregs along with them, and to where the German just crashed."

Howard Mays was conscious now, standing on his own feet. "What about the German?" he said.

"I took the liberty and pleasure of cracking at him with one of the Thompson guns," the big Russian told him. "Of course, the girl was with him, but he'd kill her himself, if he thought he had to, the way things are going for him now . . . But I caught one of his wings for him, ripped the ailerons all up. He crashed low, from about a hundred feet, and it didn't burn, so he couldn't have smashed badly, or hurt himself and the girl much. He's a flyer, that mug, no matter what else he is, and he brought his ship right down among his own paid help—the Touaregs."

Howard Mays reached over and grasped Henri de la Goustier by the shoulder, bit his fingertips in hard. "You understand what this man just said, soldier?"

"Yes." Henri de la Goustier was occupied in bandaging his shoulder wound, spoke lifting his head swiftly. "And the Touaregs have some of the fastest riding camels in the desert. If Von Graemer can pick up two of those, and get just one water-hole ahead of us between here and the border into Tripoli, he's gone, as far as I'm concerned—rather, we're concerned."

"That's better," Howard Mays said. "You stick at keeping that 'we' for a little while. So, what do you plan to do?"

Henri de la Goustier was capable of

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bringing back the corners of his wide mouth in a smile. "It seems," he said, "that we're surrounded with friends; your friends. How do they fight?"

"Let me show you . . . But then what?"

"Then you and I, with the two fastest camels in the Corps, those right over there, go after Von Graemer—and Susan. If your lads can chop a hole through the Touaregs for us, I think we can do it."

"Let's go! You got any hand grenades there, in your gear?"

"Half a case. And a Chauchat gun."

"Bring the gun yourself; I think Von Graemer has one a lot like it in his plane, that he won't forget. But I haven't seen a Touareg yet who would like being violently introduced to a hand grenade . . ."

CHAPTER XII.

"MY SWORD."

THEY climbed up the bank side by side, Bakna behind them with the two ex-Legionnaires, kicking the two chosen riding camels along. On the ridges above lay the hard-bitten and quiet men of Howard Mays's *harka,* now pleasantly engaged in the pursuit they had come to the American to lead them in, swift, decisive combat.

Below, in a wide, loose, covering half circle in the desert, the Touareg tribesmen lay, firing intermittently but shrewdly every time they were given a target, earning the pay in gold Von Graemer had given them.

The men of Howard Mays's *harka* and Henri de la Goustier's men of the Camel Corps just surged down on them, in an easy skirmishing order, turning a flank in with sub machine-gun fire, clotting the half-naked tribesmen near the center, and then lobbing four or five grenades there, splitting the line wide, to then drive a wedge through. That wedge they maintained and broadened with their rifle butts and their treasured bayonets.

The Touaregs fought very well, at first joyously, then desperately. But they could not stand against the steel and this kind of men who faced them, slow, certain and terrible in their own eagerness. As Howard Mays and his cousin vaulted up into their camel saddles and raced off into the desert, following the double pair of fresh tracks toward the east which led away from the crashed plane, the Touaregs had just chosen to no longer fight, had turned to flee.

In that desert chase which led constantly towards the east and the border, it was Henri de la Goustier who led, riding low with his camel.

But it was near noon of the next day before they could see the man and the girl they pursued, and then only distantly and very far away, in the glittering, dancing mirages of the sun. Von Graemer rode one big Touareg mount and led another, upon which jounced the unconscious body of Susan Lewis.

"Must like her," Howard Mays grunted, wasting precious energy and breath.

"From what you've said," Henri de la Goustier said harshly, "he must both care for her and, now, she knows personally about him, be very afraid of her. He'll kill her, though, if he thinks it's necessary—and unless we kill him first."

"We'll do that, get him," his cousin said, low and rapidly. "He'll have to stop at that water-hole; his beasts are as tired as these."

"It will be there," Henri said, squinting forward in the cruel sunlight. "In about an hour now. And he's got a sub machine-gun, too."

THE sun had passed its zenith and gone down towards the reddened desert rim to the west. Above the mud-walled well, already sensing death, vultures climbed, slipped down and wheeled. From behind its barricade, with care, with precision and in controlled calmness, the Baron Von Graemer utilized every bit of advantage his cover and his twenty minutes' lead had given him, fired shot for shot and burst for burst at the two men out there in the sand.

One man, the Captain of Camel Corps,

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he knew, handled the Chauchat gun; Von Graemer concentrated on him, fearing if he feared anything the shuddering impact of those spraying bullets about him against the sand and the mud walls of the well. The Captain, as seen in Von Graemer's logic, was conscious of the fact that he possessed the more powerful weapon than his cousin, would thus, in time, take more chances in using it, to end this combat. The Baron Von Graemer gave himself over to almost complete contemplation of Henri de la Goustier; the other man, Howard Mays, was armed only with a Lebel carbine.

From one slight depression to another, Henri de la Goustier was crawling forward; for the passage of several seconds, as he crawled across the flat space between them, he would have to show his head and torso. The Baron Von Graemer made a clucking sound of pleasure in his throat, set his teeth firmly together, trained his weapon deliberately and fired a burst.

Henri de la Goustier started up from the sand, he staggered weirdly for an instant from side to side, the Chauchat gun sagging in his hands, then dropped back, from sight. Von Graemer laughed aloud and looked behind him. Susan Lewis lay there, bound hand and foot, but ungagged and conscious now. "There goes one beloved cousin, Gretchen," he told her. "In a minute now, I'll fix the other. And then we'll go on, and just have a very nice time . . . How will that be, Gretchen?"

She could laugh dimly at him. "Just be sure you get them both," she told him. "Or I'll have to get you myself somehow."

"You are not at all polite, Gretchen," he told her, but then turned around for his renewed and now uninterrupted attack upon Howard Mays. In the moments he had spent talking to the girl, Howard Mays had crawled much closer, had just nicked the corner of the well wall with a shrewd shot. The Baron let a little whistling sound of pleasure go through his teeth.

He brought the piece in to him, his powerful hands set about the grips, his eyes straining along the sights. This second man was performing now the same act that had been his cousin's undoing just a minute or so ago. Swiftly, the Baron was possessed of the thought that these two cousins had for years here borne the reputations of being skilled and dangerous desert fighters, yet he, a city man and a War-time combat pilot, had already killed one, was on the point of killing the other . . . He raised up a little more, to be absolutely sure; Henri de la Goustier's burst of bullets, fired nearly point-blank from a distance of twenty yards, smashed squarely through his brain.

UPON one of the camels the recent Baron Von Graemer had borrowed from his late allies, the Touaregs, Howard Mays had found several leathern bags containing fresh dates and honey and bread crumbs, the favorite and usual repast of the desert man. Sitting there in the shade by the well, the three of them ate.

"No reason to save," Henri de la Goustier said. "Bakna will have been back at the *poste* by this time, and there'll be a detail out which will pick us up some time during the night, if not a bombing plane in from the Sudan. Bakna is a smart man, but I guess you can tell me that, as well as I can tell you . . ."

"Yes, I guess I can," Howard Mays said, searching in his pouch for tobacco for more cigarettes. "He did a good job, out there in the *bled;* he asked for it himself—said he could get to you and fix things, if I'd just get the *harka* out of there myself, give him a water skin, and let him 'stumble' into that patrol you had out. A little progress seems to have been made since then, anyhow."

But Susan Lewis was sitting upright, gazing at both of them after she had stared off across the desert where they had buried the Baron Von Graemer deeply if without ceremony a little while ago. "What," she asked, "is going to happen, after that patrol, or plane, does get here for us?"

"You answer that," Howard Mays said. "This is your country, Henri; I've just been here, having my fun . . ."

"That's it, I guess," Henri de la Goustier said. He had been scowling, but now

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he stopped, and smiled at them. "You have put it all there, or most of it, in those few words. This is my country, and you have only come here to prove yourself. That, I believe, you have done. This thing—I say it first—is forever settled between us. But when you go from here . . ."

"I'll go right back to the States," Howard Mays said instantly. "Where I came from, and where I belong . . . When I saw Susan over in Taoudeni, she had news from home for me. It seems they're having a depression there that's really serious, nationally grave—while I've been out raiding the raiders here, in this land of yours.

"And Susan tells me that all the Old Man's companies and holdings have taken an awful beating, are in rotten shape. It looks like they need a man back there something like the Old Man, somebody who likes to fight and knows how . . . It's different fighting than this, but, you get down to it, it's all the same, I guess, and I'm fully willing to do that . . . I was on my way to Fort Polignac to tell you that, after I'd seen Susan at Taoudeni, when I met you. But, quite naturally, you wouldn't listen. Because you see, Henri, Susan told me that she'd thrown her coin up in the air for the last time, and if I'd go back to the States, and act slightly normal for a time, she'd marry me. But, you—"

Henri de la Goustier shook his head. "This is mine," he said. "This is my empire, and my frontier, more so than ever, since Baron Van Graemer found that gold there.

"It will take all I have, and more. But it will never, I think, allow me to have a woman in my life, not a woman"—he turned and grinned at her—"like Susan, anyhow. There is just one more thing, though . . ."

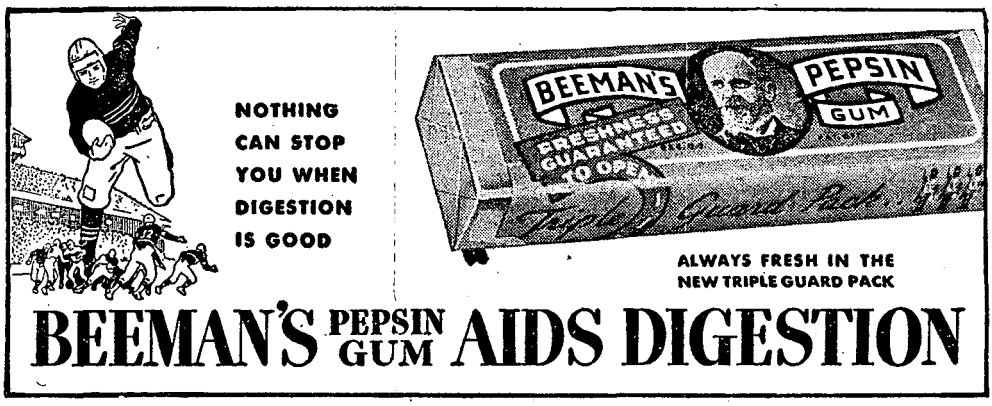
"The men who fought with me, my outfit," said Howard Mays.

"Yes. I will take those, all of them; I will use them, and get permission to form them into an independent unit of my own; after what happened last night there, I can get them all fully reinstated, square things for them with their governments. That will be something in this country that the people who come after us will be able to remember El Mafoud by."

Susan Lewis had been keeping her hand upon Howard Mays's shoulder. Now, staring out into the desert, she brought her other hand up to Henri de la Goustier's shoulder. "Well," she said, "I don't believe a man could leave a better heritage for this country, or find a better man in whose hands to leave it. You'll be happy, Henri, fully happy?"

"I'll have that," said Henri de la Goustier slowly and calmly, "and I'll have all the memories of you two, and of this. And, I'll always have my sword . . ."

THE END



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The Mystery of the Five Bald Men

By GEORGE F. WORTS

"Was the bullet fired from this gun, captain?"

Gillian Hazeltine was firmly determined not to take sides in that murder controversy—but he suddenly found himself thrown into the middle of it

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

GILLIAN HAZELTINE, the noted criminal lawyer, thought it quite funny when his banker friend, Daniel Melchior, president of the First National Bank of Greenfield, Gillian's home town, proudly displayed a sprouting crop of new hair growing on his bald pate, but Gillian became interested when Melchior told the why and wherefore of the new crop on what had been considered hopelessly barren terrain.

A month before, Melchior told Gillian, he had received a small phial from an anonymous woman. A note accompanying the phial said that if Melchior would apply the liquid contents of the bottle to his mirror-like dome, he would be pleased to notice that it would revive his hair. Melchior was pleased, but his banker's soul was even more enthralled by the financial possibilities of the strange concoction. It would mean millions of dollars to the man who could get hold of the formula and promote it.

In quick succession Gillian discovered four other bald men who had similarly been blessed by the unknown benefactress: Jonah, a crippled beggar; Pete Wimberley, burglar; Mortimer Tait, broker; and Dwight Sanford.

Shortly after, a policeman in the town of Clinton, several miles away, was a trifle startled at night when he saw a beautiful girl riding along in her car, shooting out the street lights on Main Street. The cop recognized her as Sandra Sanford, wealthy

This story began in the Argosy for October 27

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young heiress, but he locked her up anyway.

Gillian received a telephone call from Sergeant Steve Burch, night man in charge of the Clinton jail, saying that Sandra insisted on seeing Gillian immediately. Gillian drove to the Clinton jail, and there encountered an agitated group. There was Sandra's brother, Dwight; her grandmother, vinegary old Lettie Sanford; Dwight's business partner, Dale Gentry, with whom Sandra had recently quarreled after breaking off their engagement; and Ramon Pellone, with whom Sandra was infatuated.

Sandra, who had remained in the cell, refusing bail, told Gillian that she had caused her own arrest to save her life. She said that just before dinner some one had tried to shoot her as she was near an upstairs window in the Sanford home. She thought, at the time, that it was a stray shot from a hunter in the vicinity. However, as the company were having cocktails, she discovered that hers was poisoned. In terror, she had fled the house and caused her own arrest. Each one of the persons involved, she said, might have a reason for killing her.

She also told of how she recognized in Sergeant Burch a former butler of the Sanford family, who had been inside man in a robbery at the Sanford home.

Gillian reassured her, and made arrangements to take her to his own home for safekeeping. He went out to do some investigating — and was informed by telephone that Sandra had been strangled in her cell. Gillian rushed back to the jail and learned from Burch that the policeman had been drawn from the jail by a street fight between a man, O'Hoolihan, and his wife.

Gillian ordered Burch to lock up all the members of the Sanford party after he discovered a gray thread in Sandra's fingernail.

CHAPTER VIII.

LETTIE BARES HER TEETH.

AT dawn, when the phone had stopped ringing, Toro informed Gillian that Captain Murdock was waiting for him downstairs.

The tall young detective was grim and weary-looking. Over coffee, Scotch and cigars, Gillian discussed the case with him. But Captain Murdock's mind was shut.

"It's on ice," he declared. "I sent a couple of men to look the Sanford house over. They found a .32-.20 rifle bullet sunk in the door jamb in Sandra's room. It matches the bore of the boy's rifle. I'll turn it over to a ballistic expert, but there's no question about it."

"Why not?"

"Oh, hell, Gillian—why not! That cyanide in his medicine cabinet—the bullet in the jamb from his rifle—his cigarette holder on the floor of her cell—his being the last to go back there and see her alive— It's as tight as a drum."

"Can you prove in court he had exclusive opportunity?"

"It won't be necessary."

"Circumstantial evidence is dynamite, captain."

"Not in this case. By the way, have you that cigarette holder? Sergeant Burch said you kept it. The D.A. is apt to want it."

Gillian gave the cigarette holder to him, and said: "I wouldn't quit with Dwight."

"I won't. I'm going to work on them all. How about motives?"

"Now you're waking up! Under Sandra's father's will, Sandra was permitted to touch none of the principal of her legacy. In the event of her death, her grandmother and brother divided the estate between them."

"Yeah? Then that's why Dwight killed her. I know he's been broke for a couple of years."

"The old woman is broke, too. And she's a tough old bird. Dwight's business partner, Dale Gentry, is an interesting case of deceptive appear-

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ances. He looks like a Babbitt. According to Sandra, he is intensely jealous, with a hot nature. They were semi-engaged. She broke it off six weeks ago when she met the Brazilian. Gentry might have murdered her for revenge. And how about the Brazilian?"

"He's a gigolo," Murdock murmured.

"Night before last he jilted her. He's met a Pittsburgh woman—Mrs. Constance Venable, the copper king's widow — who's worth fifty times as much as Sandra was. Sandra was infatuated with Pellone. She told him if he married Mrs. Venable she would expose unsavory parts of his past."

"A rat like that wouldn't mind."

"Under the circumstances, he might. Sandra had certain information which would send him to prison for ten or twenty years."

Captain Murdock sipped his highball. He slowly shook his head. "I'll check them all up, but I'm convinced that we've got the murderer. You aren't going to defend Dwight, are you?"

"No."

The sun was well up when Captain Murdock left. Gillian shaved, showered, put on clean clothes, got into his car and drove to the laboratory of his old friend, Harry Zarrow, the city chemist.

IN the privacy of Zarrow's office, Gillian unwrapped the newspaper packages he had taken from the Clinton jail last night. He laid the garments carefully in a row on a table. Then he unfolded a small piece of memorandum pad paper.

He said to Zarrow: "I found this little gray thread caught in a nick in Sandra Sanford's fingernail, after she'd been strangled. The presumption is that she struggled with the strangler and caught this thread from some garment."

Harry Zarrow, a lean, gaunt man of thirty, smiled his bony smile.

"You won't get far with that in court, Gil."

"I'm not taking it into court. I'm merely curious. I'd like you to determine, chemically, all you can about this thread. Here are five samples from which it might have come."

He indicated the knitted gray silk necktie. "Exhibit A: the necktie worn by the night sergeant at the Clinton jail."

"Is he a suspect?"

"He is, indeed."

"According to the morning papers, the case against Dwight Sanford is in the bag."

"It may jump out of the bag. Exhibit B: a gray tweed vest worn by Dale Gentry, Dwight's business partner and the girl's ex-fiancé. Exhibit C: gray shawl worn by Grandmother Sanford. Exhibit D: sweater worn by Dwight Sanford. Exhibit E: vest worn by Ramon Pellone, the Brazilian fortune hunter — another ex-fiancé of Sandra Sanford's, but through no fault of hers. Now!"

Gillian straightened up. "Can you tell enough about the chemistry of that thread to swear which of these garments it came from?"

"Yes—if you'll give me a little time."

Gillian went to his office, stopping on his way into the building to buy copies of all the nine o'clock morning papers and the early editions of the afternoon papers.

Entering his office, he told his private secretary, Miss Walsh, that he was in to no one.

"I'm going to spend the morning," he said, "in the pursuit of contemporary literature."

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Miss Walsh glanced at the stack of newspapers. The uppermost, the Greenfield *Journal* carried a headline:

HEIRESS MURDERED IN JAIL!

Miss Walsh frowned faintly, and her eyes clouded. "You're not interesting yourself in this case, are you?"

Gillian seated himself at the desk and reached into the golden humidor for a cigar. In spite of his lack of sleep, he appeared to be in exuberant spirits. Miss Walsh knew from experience that Gillian Hazeltine would go without sleep and food, that he would scorn opportunities for fat fees, once he became absorbed in a mystery. He dearly loved a good mystery.

"Only in a detached way, Miss Walsh."

"There are a great many important matters—"

"Oh, I'll attend to them. You know, Miss Walsh," he said enthusiastically, "Dwight Sanford didn't kill his sister."

"Who did?"

"That's the mystery!"

"Are you taking the boy's case?"

"No."

SHE went out, quietly closing the door. Gillian read the newspapers. The murder of Sandra Sanford had crowded even the President's latest message off the front page in every case except that of the conservative Greenfield *Times*. Sandra's photograph was reproduced on most front pages. Sandra in her flying costume. Sandra talking to reporters on her return from England. Sandra holding up one of her prize-winning Scotties. Sandra standing beside the handsome black horse which was her favorite mount. In all these photographs she was smiling, beautiful, aristocratic.

There were photographs of Sandra with her brother, of Sandra with the handsome Brazilian, Ramon Pellone. Indeed, the principals in the sensational case were all well represented. An old picture of Lettie Sanford, taken years ago when she was a reigning society matron, had been exhumed and was printed. There were flashlight photographs taken last night in the Clinton jail; photographs of the old brick building, of Sergeant Burch.

One enterprising tabloid had a front page photograph of the dead girl on her cot in Cell Three. On pages two and three were other flashlight photographs of Dwight Sanford, Ramon Pellone, Dale Gentry, and Grandmother Sanford, in their cells.

Every paper carried somewhere a photograph of Gillian Hazeltine—the particular grim, scowling one that city editors seemed to love and his wife particularly detested.

And, as usual, the newspapers were trying the case—and deciding without much delay on the victim. The victim was, of course, Dwight Sanford.

Shortly before noon, Gillian's telephone rang. He let it ring for awhile, then answered it. The switchboard girl said: "Miss Walsh told me you weren't to be disturbed, but the district attorney's office is very anxious to get in touch with you. It's Mr. Redfern."

"I'll talk to him."

JOHN REDFERN was a man whose steel Gillian had learned, in sundry courtroom clashes, to respect. He was an assistant district attorney, by title, but the acting district attorney, in fact. Mark Storm, the district attorney, had gone abroad for the summer and would not return until late fall. And John Redfern was ably taking Storm's place.

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His brisk, hard voice came into the receiver: "Mr. Hazeltine, I've just finished questioning some of the witnesses in the Sanford case. Mrs. Sanford has asked me to retain you, if possible, as special counsel for the prosecution. She'll meet your price, if it isn't too steep."

"I thought she was broke."

"Doesn't she inherit about a half million under Jim Sanford's will?"

"Why is she so anxious to prosecute her grandson? It hardly seems natural."

"She's determined to avenge her granddaughter's death."

"It still seems unnatural. Are you convinced that Dwight killed her?"

"Absolutely! I've only gone into the case superficially, but it looks airtight. Frankly, I don't think we'll need you on the prosecution, but the old lady apparently thinks you're the smartest lawyer on earth. She doesn't want a slip-up."

"It seems to me," Gillian said, "she's suspiciously over-anxious."

"Don't you think Dwight did it?"

"I'm not sure. Any of them might have done it."

"Are you thinking of defending Dwight?"

"Nope. Have you talked to him?"

"Yes. He flatly denies it, of course. Look here, Hazeltine. If you want to scare Mrs. Sanford off, give me a stiff figure to put up to her."

"No. I have to think it over. I'll call you later."

He went back to his newspapers. A little after twelve he went out to lunch. He stopped at the newsstand outside the lobby to buy the latest crop of newspapers. He was rolling them up when he became aware of a pair of very dark, very large, very bright eyes watching him.

They belonged to a small, slim and very pretty girl in a trim blue business suit and a smart, perky little black hat. She was smiling faintly and mysteriously at him, and probing him with those remarkable, beautiful eyes.

Her gloved right hand came up in an impulsive little gesture, and for a moment he thought she was going to approach and speak to him. With the roll of newspapers under his arm, he walked around the corner to The Green Tavern. He liked the beer there.

He seated himself in a booth and spread out the newspapers. He was studying the headlines when he became aware that some one had slipped into the seat across the table from him. He looked up. It was the girl in the perky little black hat.

She wasn't smiling. She was as white as paper, and her dark eyes were enormous. She moistened her lips nervously with the point of a pink tongue.

She said in a throaty, uncertain little voice: "You—you're Gillian Hazeltine, aren't you?"

"I am."

"I—I hope you'll pardon my—my boldness, Mr. Hazeltine. My name is Jane Wilder." She swallowed. "I'm Chester Maddox's secretary."

"Oh, yes." Chester Maddox was the president of the Maddox Wholesale Hardware Company.

She blurted: "I'm the girl Dwight Sanford is going to marry."

CHAPTER IX.

A GLIMMER OF HOPE.

SHE remained rigid, with her elbows on the table, her gloved hands clasped, her beautiful dark eyes fixed steadily, with a swimming quality, on Gillian's.

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"Really?" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Then you must be the girl Sandra mentioned to me."

Miss Wilder caught her breath sharply. "Did she mention me?"

"She did. She said Dwight had turned over a new leaf since he'd met a nice girl."

The girl gave a bitter little laugh. "It almost looks," she said, "as if his thumb had slipped while he was turning over the leaves!"

"Does it?" Gillian asked quietly.

"Well, doesn't it?" she cried, watching him intently.

"I'm not sure, Miss Wilder," he said.

Jane Wilder took a quick, deep breath, as if she were about to plunge into cold water.

"I'm sure. I'm positive. If I can't be sure about this, then I can't ever be sure of anything again as long as I live! Dwight didn't kill her! He couldn't have killed her! I know he didn't kill her!"

"Have you talked to him?"

"They wouldn't let me."

"Have you had your lunch?"

"Oh, I couldn't eat!"

He called a waiter and ordered a hot roast beef sandwich and coffee for her, a platter of cold cuts and beer for himself.

When the waiter had gone, the girl said, more calmly, "He's the victim of a frame-up!"

Gillian didn't mention that the women interested in an accused man always say that. What he said was: "Tell me about Dwight—and yourself."

She gave him a bitter little smile. "Perhaps I'd better boldly state my achievements. I met Dwight about two years ago, when he was probably the champion bar-hopper of Greenfield. The most important event in his day was a discussion of what speakeasy he should go to for dinner."

Gillian smiled. Miss Wilder said vigorously, "Oh, I'm not exaggerating. It was all he had to think about—eating and drinking. Every day was the same—drinking himself out of one hangover into another."

"But you reformed him."

"The trouble was, I fell in love with him. A girl who falls in love with that kind of man is generally a fool, but we won't go into that."

"But you fell in love with him."

"And, oddly enough, he fell in love with me."

"Not so oddly," Gillian murmured to himself.

"Up to that time," Miss Wilder went on, "he had been so busy spending and speculating with and losing his inheritance that he hadn't given the future a thought. Not a thought! Two things happened at once—his meeting me and his reaching the last crumb of his fortune."

"If you had met him sooner, it might have been a different story."

"Yes, I'm sure of that. He was pretty desperate—and scared. He saw other rich men's sons all around him, their money gone, taking jobs mowing lawns, doing day labor. I can tell you it brought him up sharp. I persuaded him to stop trying to drink up the output of all the gin mills in America. He promised. I'm proud to say that since that day he's been the most conservative of drinkers. Never more than a cocktail or a highball or two in the course of an evening. I prefer that. I'm suspicious of drunkards who turn teetotalers."

Miss Wilder's wonderful brown eyes were shining. She had relaxed a little,

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And there was a little color in her cheeks.

"I LIKE to think he loved me enough to stop being a rumhound. It was a struggle, but—well, we won it. The next step on the reform program was harder. I reminded him that he had studied chemistry in college, had graduated with all sorts of honors. He'd had some wonderful offers, but he hadn't had to work, so he scorned them all.

"That had been during the boom times. Once he'd made up his mind to go back to chemistry, he wrote all these people who had made the offers. Too late! The depression was in full swing. Chemical engineers were a glut on the market."

Jane Wilder sighed. "It was very discouraging. It looked as if there was no hope. Then, in some bankruptcy proceeding notices, I came across this little commercial chemical laboratory on Front Street. It used to be the Argyle Chemical Laboratory.

"We looked it over, and it was exactly what Dwight wanted—modern and beautifully equipped for metallurgy and other high temperature work. He wanted to perfect a cheap rustless steel, a high temperature lubricating oil, and a process for recovering the values from chimney smoke.

"But he didn't have any money. I didn't have any money. No one had any money. It was a very critical moment. I wrote his sister, then in Paris. I sketched the situation, frankly asked her help—and got a grand letter. Don't let anybody tell you Sandra wasn't a good egg. She said she'd advance all the money Dwight needed—and suggested that the two of them form a partnership. Just about then, Dwight heard about this half-perfected process of Dale Gentry's for making synthetic, oil-proof, acid-proof rubber. So Dwight was off to a flying start."

"I thought Gentry was a business partner?"

"In a sense, he is. But only in connection with the synthetic rubber process. Any other processes developed in the laboratory were Dwight's and Sandra's."

"How much money has she advanced to date?"

"A little over a hundred thousand."

"Do you know if she had threatened to stop these advances?"

"Heavens, no! She was crazy about the lab—and delighted with the change in Dwight. He isn't really very much interested in money. The money-mad member of that family is that old woman. Dwight is really crazy about chemistry. Since he took over that lab he's often worked sixteen or eighteen hours a day. I've seen him work nights, Sundays, holidays. And when he isn't working he's studying. He's become a completely changed man—a wonderful man. I don't care how strong the evidence is, I'll never believe Dwight killed Sandra. He was terribly fond of her, and she simply adored him. No, Mr. Hazeltine, it wasn't Dwight."

Gillian shook his head slowly, regretfully. "I'm beginning to suspect that whoever killed her planted evidence so cleverly against Dwight that it will be impossible to make any jury believe in his innocence."

Jane Wilder bent forward on her elbows. Her beautiful dark eyes were glittering. "You could do it."

HAVING suspected that this was coming, Gillian was prepared for it. "You understand, of course, that I have to be hard-boiled, Miss

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Wilder. A criminal lawyer, regardless of his sympathies, can't afford to touch any case in which there isn't some glimmer of hope."

"But we know Dwight is innocent," the girl cried.

"But how can it be proved?"

"You're a genius at ferreting out the truth!"

"You'd better begin eating that sandwich," he said. "I spent all of last evening questioning people who should have been eye witnesses to that murder. It was like questioning those three famous monkeys: They saw nothing. They heard nothing. They said nothing."

Jane Wilder cried: "I knew it! It's a conspiracy! All you have to do is break them down one at a time! Third-degree them!"

"I don't think it's a conspiracy. Most people are like that under excitement. They see nothing, hear nothing. Or one hears one shot, another hears three shots, still another hears six. But once get them on the witness stand! Vanity forces them to prove how clear-minded, how cool they were when it happened! And that's what you're up against in this case."

Jane Wilder said: "One of them killed Sandra. On the witness stand, that one will be the strongest witness against Dwight—for self-protection!"

Gillian smiled wanly. "How can you prove that to a jury?"

"You could do it! You could clear him! I've seen you in court. I've seen you win harder cases than this."

"I don't recall them. I've had to make it a rule not to touch a case unless there's something to go into court on. My belief in a man's innocence is not enough, Miss Wilder. People are peculiar. They don't want a lawyer, especially a criminal lawyer, without a reputation as a hundred per cent winner. That's my reputation to date and I can't afford to risk it."

The girl in the perky black hat stared at him a moment, then her remarkable eyes seemed to dissolve darkly. She continued to stare at him, making no sound or movement, with tears slowly running out of her eyes and down her cheeks. Her mouth was twisted.

Gillian unfolded a clean handkerchief and pushed it into her hand. "For God's sake—" he began.

"Listen, Mr. Hazeltine," she said, but she took the handkerchief and dried her eyes and her cheeks. "You have a reputation for helping the under-dog."

"Listen, Miss Wilder," he said grimly, "Dwight is no under-dog. Under his father's will, at Sandra's death he stands to receive better than a half million. He can afford to hire Clarence Darrow."

"I'm not talking about Dwight. I'm talking about myself. I'm the under-dog. Ever since I was nine years old I've had to fight and claw for my living. I'm the girl you hear about who grew up on the wrong side of the railroad tracks and has been trying to make something of myself. I've fought every inch of the way, Mr. Hazeltine. Dwight is the achievement of my life. I'm proud of him, and I'm proud of myself for making a man out of a drunkard. He has become a grand person. Together, we can lick the world. And you're the one person in the world who can give us the chance!"

GILLIAN said dryly: "You're such a smart girl—tell me what Dwight's defense is!"

"You're a genius. Given a little time, you can find who it was who planted that evidence against Dwight."

"Whom do you suspect?"

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"Ramon Pellone—but that's only a guess. It's a feminine hunch based on the fact that I detest him for making Sandra unhappy."

"This morning," Gillian said, "the district attorney told me old Mrs. Sanford wants to retain me as special prosecutor."

"That old vulture! Wouldn't that make you suspect her of killing Sandra? It would me."

"How about Dale Gentry?"

"What would he have to gain?"

"Possibly nothing but the satisfaction of killing the girl who jilted him."

"But he isn't insane!"

"He's insanely jealous."

"Then it might have been any of those three!"

"Four," Gillian corrected her. "Sergeant Burch, according to Sandra, was the inside man of a robbery in her house when she was seven. He threatened to kill her if she ever told. Last night she recognized him. He may have recognized her."

"It's horribly complicated, Mr. Hazeltine. But—"

"It's too complicated."

"But you can sift out the truth!"

Gillian said nothing. He paid the check, got up and reached for his hat. He started for the door. Jane Wilder, with a look of panic, snatched up her purse and hastened after him.

At the door he met a small mob of reporters. One of them said: "Here he is!" And another panted: "Good Lord, Mr. Hazeltine, we've been combing this town for you. What is there in this rumor that you're going to act as prosecutor in the Sanford case?"

Before Gillian could speak, Jane Wilder, at his side, said in a firm, clear voice: "It's wrong, boys. Mr. Hazeltine is going to defend Dwight Sanford!"

"I—" Gillian began.

"I'm Dwight Sanford's fiancée," the girl said rapidly. "I'm Chester Maddox's private secretary. You can quote Mr. Hazeltine as saying that he is absolutely convinced of Dwight's innocence. Certain new information has come to light—"

"Just a mo—" Gillian began again.

"You can say," Miss Wilder rushed on, "that I am throwing up my job to help Mr. Hazeltine on the case. Do you want a picture of us together?"

Josh Hammersley, reporter on the Greenfield *Times,* said: "What's this new dope, Gillian? The Clinton coroner says it's in the bag. So does Dan Murdock."

Gillian said dryly: "My spokesman will answer all questions, boys."

The reporters pressed closer to the girl in the perky black hat.

"It's not for publication," she disappointed them. "But you know Mr. Hazeltine's reputation. He has a hundred per cent record for winning murder trials. He cannot afford to touch a case in which there isn't some very definite glimmer of hope. Could you smile hopefully, Mr. Hazeltine?"

She had taken his arm. She was smiling faintly and mysteriously into the cameras. Shutters snapped.

When the reporters and photographers had gone, Gillian said: "All right, Jane. You're a fast worker. If you're as fast at digging up useful evidence, we may have a chance. By the way, what's this definite glimmer of hope?"

She slanted a cocky smile at him and answered: "Jane Wilder!"

RETURNING to his office, Gillian found Miss Walsh waiting for him, flushed pinkly and wearing the somewhat grim look she reserved for arguments with the boss.

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"Harry Zarrow called. It's something about a thread. He wants you to call back."

Gillian sat down at his desk and spread out the newspapers which he hadn't had time to read during luncheon.

His secretary said defiantly: "Mr. Hazeltine, I think you should take the Sanford case."

"Why?"

"It should be worth fifty or seventy-five thousand."

"I said—why?"

Miss Walsh's air of defiance became more pronounced. "His fiancée was up here talking to me this morning. No man with a girl like her would be foolish enough to commit a murder. She talked to me for two hours."

"Yes," Gillian sighed. "Jane is really a brilliant conversationalist. Call up the D. A.'s office and tell John Redfern I must decline Mrs. Sanford's offer to act as special prosecutor, as I am taking her grandson's case."

Miss Walsh's grimness vanished. She blushed and laughed. She cried: "Have we a fighting chance, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"We're going to fight for a fighting chance. Send Hartley in. By the way, Jane is to have access to me at any time."

When she had closed the door, he called Harry Zarrow. And when the city chemist answered, Gillian said: "All right, Harry. Let's have it. Did it come from Sergeant Burch's necktie, Dale Gentry's vest, Ramon Pellone's waistcoat, grandmother's shawl—or Dwight Sanford's sweater?"

Harry Zarrow told him. Gillian said sadly, "Yes, I was afraid of that. It makes it tough. You could keep this under your hat. It'll take more than a curly gray thread to win this case."

He was hanging up the receiver when Jake Hartley, the chief of his investigation department, came in.

"Jake, I'm going in for a little windmill tilting."

"Yes, sir; so I heard."

"This case will be won or lost in your department. You are to spare no expense. You are to leave no stone unturned. I want the hour-by-hour life histories of Ramon Pellone, Dale Gentry, Sergeant Burch and a red-headed man named O'Hoolihan, who was picked up last night in Clinton on an assault and battery charge."

"Yes, sir; he has left town."

"So soon?"

"He and his wife paid a ten dollar fine and took the noon train west."

"Have him tailed."

"Yes, sir; I attended to it. I suppose you know that Pellone, Gentry and old Mrs. Sanford were released just before noon. You didn't mention her just now. Is she a suspect?"

Gillian reached for a cigar and said, "Whisper when you mention her name."

"What shall I do about her?"

"Watch her like a hawk. Our whole case is hanging by a thread. And—it may be the wrong thread!"

CHAPTER X.

A TRUMP CARD?

A WEEK before the case of the people versus Dwight Sanford was scheduled for a hearing in the court of Judge Hilary Dare, a rumor reached Gillian that Acting District Attorney John Redfern had something up his sleeve; that Mr. Redfern was borrowing and planning to use one of Gillian Hazeltine's favorite courtroom weapons—a surprise!

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In the preparation of a murder case for trial, the district attorney's office is compelled to give counsel for the defense access to all the information it possesses. It is possible, however, for a clever district attorney, willing to take the risk, to withhold certain crumbs.

And apparently this was what that smart, two-fisted young lawyer, John Redfern, was doing.

Once this rumor reached the Hazeltine law offices, Gillian set into activity a number of grapevines, some of which might or might not reach into the district attorney's archives. He wanted to know what that surprise was. But the grapevines were, as far as this particular information was concerned, so many dead circuits.

Later, he blamed himself for not having drawn Dwight out more fully. He had questioned Dwight at great length during his preparation of the case, and it was doubtless Dwight's fault that Gillian entered court that brisk fall morning unaware of what the surprise might be.

He was certain, however, that it would be a tricky case.

The courtroom was packed. A Hazeltine case always packed a courtroom, largely because of Hazeltine's reputation for dramatics, showmanship, trickery, surprises. He was a great jury lawyer, and he never disappointed his audience.

The opinion of the public in the case of the People versus Dwight Sanford had been shaped by the attitude of the press. The press considered Dwight Sanford guilty on *prima facie* evidence. Yet both press and public knew Hazeltine's iron-clad rule: never to take a case in which he did not positively believe his client to be innocent; never to take a case in which there was not some loophole through which his client might escape.

Here, then, was a clash of apparent facts—indeed, a head-on collision between apparent facts. The district attorney's office had established in the public's mind, through the agency of the press, that Dwight Sanford was a red-handed murderer. Meeting this fact head-on was Gillian Hazeltine's emphatic assertion that Dwight Sanford was innocent.

These two opposing views, or facts, were to meet in head-on collision in court. It promised drama. It promised excitement. And when one considered the legal forces arrayed, it promised battle. Heading the prosecution was Acting District Attorney John Redfern, a brilliant lawyer, a two-fisted fighter, a man who every one knew had high political ambitions—a man who must win cases to advance those ambitions.

Almost single-handed, Hazeltine would conduct the case for the defense. It was usually so. Hazeltine was, in the criminal branch of the law, a species of lone wolf.

There was said to be bad blood between him and John Redfern. The acting district attorney still smarted from one courtroom defeat at Gillian's hands.

And because of all this promised drama and strife and personal bad feeling, it was natural that the public should want to see this courtroom battle of legal giants. It explained why admission was by ticket only, and why the press table was jammed with reporters, special writers, artists.

WHEN Hazeltine entered the courtroom that morning—a somewhat chunky man, not tall, with ink-black hair sprinkled

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prematurely with silver, a quiet-looking man—a whispering went up from the spectators, and a tenseness followed.

John Redfern was already at the counsel table, surrounded by his aids and secretaries. When Hazeltine reached his end of the table, Redfern glanced up and got up. He was a tall, blond, powerful-looking man of about thirty-five, with the hard blue eyes of a fighter, the straight wide forehead of a thinker, and the wide, prominent jaws of a man of tremendous will power.

The two men surveyed each other for perhaps five seconds before either spoke. There was electricity in the air. The hard blue eyes of the prosecutor met the steel-blue eyes of the counsel for the defense.

"Good morning," Hazeltine said.

"Good morning," Redfern said.

Neither smiled. They sat down at opposite ends of the table. Then came a young person for whom the fickle and emotional public had acquired a great liking; the fiancée of the man on trial. Jane Wilder came down the aisle to the counsel table, looking neither to left nor right—a small, slim, beautiful girl in brown, with a perky little brown hat. There was a faint approving murmur as she went down the aisle. The public not only liked Jane. Having heard at great length her story, the public was sorry for her—was sorry chiefly because of her misfortune to be in love with a man doomed to die in the electric chair.

She seated herself beside Gillian Hazeltine and gave him a wan little smile. There were whispers, audible murmurs about the courtroom.

Judge Hilary Dare came in, black-robed and grave; a long-faced, sad-looking jurist with an ascetic air. He at once called Redfern and Hazeltine to the bench and dryly said: "Well, gentlemen, is this to be a battle of the century—or a trial in a court of law? A sideshow performance—or a serious attempt at seeing that justice is done?"

Gravely, Hazeltine said: "Your honor, the defense has an excellent case."

Grimly, Redfern said: "Your honor, the State has an airtight case!"

The battle over a jury was now launched. It wore out the patience of Judge Dare. It wore the nerves of the spectators to a frazzle. It decided nothing except that the opposing counsel were bitter enemies and determined to fight at the drop of a hat.

The jury box was filled by the end of the second day. Next morning, Gillian pleaded not guilty and the trial started.

IN his preliminary address to the jury, Mr. Redfern declared that it was his intention to prove that the accused, Dwight Sanford, had deliberately brought about the death of his sister Sandra in a cell in the Clinton jail on the night of September 30th, and that when motive was established no doubt would exist in any man's mind.

"I will endeavor to establish that this man deliberately and most foully killed his sister, after several deliberate attempts had failed; that he was prompted to do so by an overwhelming greed to amass a fortune of many millions — perhaps even billions!"

Gillian knew that the tail at least of the cat was protruding from the bag. A surprise motive!

He looked quickly at Dwight, sitting beside him, pale from his long confinement. The young man was frowning.

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Gillian whispered: "What does that mean?"

And Dwight, with a slow headshake, answered, "I don't understand."

Jane Wilder had a bewildered air. She whispered to Gillian: "It doesn't make sense."

She was pale, too. Since Gillian had decided to take the case she had slept very little. She was thinner, and her large dark eyes looked larger and were more beautiful than ever. Yet in spite of her cleverness, her willingness, her inexhaustible energy, she had accomplished very little.

JOHN REDFERN

The first witness for the State was Dr. Horace Blake, the coroner of Clinton; a lanky old man in a baggy black suit which looked as if it had been frequently slept in. He was an untidy old man with untidy gray hair and the comfortable manner, acquired at many bedsides, of the old-fashioned country doctor.

Duly sworn, he testified that at about nine o'clock on the night of September thirtieth Sergeant Burch, of the Clinton police force, had telephoned him at the house of Seth Freeford's, where he was occupied until 2 A.M. delivering Mrs. Freeford's baby. It had been a critical case, Mrs. Freeford had almost lost her life, and he had not been able to reach the Clinton jail until two thirty.

"I found the dead woman lying on the cot in Cell Three, on her back. She had obviously been strangled. A bruise under her hair above the left temple indicated she had first been struck from in front."

Mr. Redfern: "Did you perform an autopsy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was the skull fractured?"

"No. There may have been a slight concussion. It would be hard to say whether or not she was unconscious after that blow was struck. But she was struck from in front, and probably dazed, and she was strangled from in front. Thumb marks on the windpipe showed plainly. Finger marks on the back of the neck showed less plainly."

The district attorney asked him other questions relating to the manner in which Sandra Sanford had been killed. Then:

"Is it your opinion, doctor, that Miss Sanford could have been strangled at the cell door, the murderer first striking her through the bars, then reaching through the bars, strangling her, and hurling her with sufficient force so that she fell upon the cot in the position in which she was found?"

Dr. Blake considered and said: "It's stretching the possibilities, but it's possible."

Mr. Redfern gave the witness to Mr. Hazeltine.

MR. HAZELTINE: "Doctor, have you heard of the theory that some one, rather than reaching through the bars, striking, strangling and hurling Miss Sanford across the room, entered the cell by

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means of a key, and struck her, and strangled her, and left her lying on the cot?"

"Yes, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Which theory do you consider the most plausible?"

Mr. Redfern made an impatient gesture, but said nothing. And when Dr. Blake hesitated, Gillian said: "Make your answer, not in light of what you have heard or read, but on the basis of your inspection of that cell."

"I should say that some one entered the cell and killed the girl. It would be quite unlikely for her dead body to have been hurled across the cell in such a way that it fell upon the cot. I should say the murderer either held her there while strangling her, or dropped her there afterward."

"Would you say that the murderer would hardly be likely to bother hurling her—"

"Objection!"

"Sustained."

Mr. Hazeltine: "Dr. Blake, in your examination of the body and your inspection of the cell, did you form any opinion of the murderer's identity?"

"No, sir."

"Thank you, doctor."

THE country doctor stepped down. The next witness called was Dr. Alexander MacWherter. Gillian became watchful as a slender, sandy-haired man of thirty-eight or forty walked to the stand. He didn't look like a doctor. Gillian caught a whiff of stables as the tall, slightly-bent man passed. He suspected that the State's surprise was about to be sprung. And there was a nervous air about the district attorney as he walked toward the witness stand and began questioning.

"What is your occupation?"

"I am a veterinary surgeon."

"How long, Dr. MacWherter, have you practiced this profession?"

"Eighteen years." The witness spoke calmly. He was a mild-looking man with calm blue eyes.

"Where?"

"Always in and about Greenfield."

"Then you are well known in this part of the country?"

"I am supposed to be." The witness smiled faintly.

"In the course of your practice have you ever been called upon to give medical or surgical aid to animals owned by a Miss Sandra Sanford?"

"Yes, sir."

"On many occasions?"

"I have looked after the dogs and horses on the Sanford estate for about fifteen years. I have taken charge of their horse breedings, and I have taken care of sick horses and dogs."

"Were you ever called upon to prescribe medicines for Miss Sanford's Scotties?"

"Yes, sir. They are highly-bred dogs, somewhat inbred, and are delicate."

Judge Dare said, "Just a moment, doctor." And to Gillian: "Mr. Hazeltine, have you any objection to this testimony?"

Gillian said: "On the contrary, your honor, I am fascinated."

"About six months ago, doctor," Mr. Redfern said, "were you called by Miss Sanford to prescribe some medicine or treatment for a skin ailment with which several of her Scotties were afflicted?"

"I was."

"What was the nature of this skin ailment?"

"The medical term for it is *demodex folliculorum*. It is known commonly as red mange. It is a very bad disease."

"Is *demodex folliculorum*, or red mange, ordinarily curable?"

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"It is sometimes responsive to some treatments, but is supposed to be incurable."

"What is the usual treatment?"

"Medicated salves and liquids seldom even check the spread of the infection. In some cases, red mange has responded to an inoculation of a serum made of germs taken from the subject."

"Is that a positive cure?"

"No, sir."

"Kindly tell the jury your experience with Miss Sanford's Scotties six months ago."

Dr. MacWherter turned to the jury and answered in his even voice: "Miss Sanford called me in to see what could be done about this red mange they had. We tried everything known, including the serum injections. The dogs did not respond to the treatment. I suggested that she let me chloroform the afflicted dogs, but she wouldn't stand for it. She said she would try some ideas of her own. She had come across an old formula for a mange medicine in a book her great-grandfather had owned, and she tried this. It seemed to show some improvement, then she had her brother experiment with the formula in his chemical laboratory, trying out some of her ideas."

"Do you know, doctor, whether or not these experiments were successful?"

THE veterinary grinned broadly. "I'll tell the world they were! She called me in about three months ago, and she showed me the dogs. Every one of them was cured! She had beaten the red mange! I asked her if I could have the formula, and she said no; that she had some other ideas in mind."

"Do you know what these ideas were?"

"Well, I've found out since. She had the idea that if that formula would cure anything as incurable as *demodex folliculorum*, it might have some result on a bald-headed man. She sent samples of it anonymously, I believe, to four bald men in Greenfield and—"

"When was this?"

"I believe it was about a month before she was murdered."

"Are you acquainted with the results of this formula in connection with baldness?"

"I've heard it grows a fine head of hair."

"Did Miss Sanford say anything to you about the possible financial value of this formula?"

"Yes, sir. She and her brother and I discussed it one time in the stable. We all agreed that if it would actually grow hair on a bald man it was worth millions—countless millions!"

"Have you ever seen this medicine?"

"Yes, sir. It's a pale purple, or lavender-colored, liquid with a faint smell of camphor."

The district attorney took out of his coat pocket a six-ounce prescription bottle a third full of a pale purple liquid.

"Doctor, can you identify this as that mange medicine?"

He gave the bottle to the veterinary, who unscrewed the cap and sniffed the contents.

"This is the stuff."

"That's all, doctor. Your honor, I wish to introduce this as Material Exhibit A for the State."

The bottle was admitted and ticketed.

"Your witness, Mr. Hazeltine!"

Gillian waived cross-examination. He felt irritable. Dwight should have told him about this; given him a chance to prepare for it. It was Gillian's first inkling of the identity of

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the mysterious and anonymous woman who had sent the purple hair-restorer to various bald men.

"Next witness: Dr. Hogarth Darwin!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOMBSHELL.

A SLIM, well-tailored man with a brown Vandyke walked to the witness stand. He testified that he was a dermatologist; that he maintained a suite of offices in the Forbisher Building; that he specialized in diseases of the skin and scalp, and that he had a great many patients who were men suffering from baldness or near baldness. Dr. Darwin admitted, with becoming modesty, that he was probably the best-known dermatologist in the State.

John Redfern said, in his clipped, vigorous way: "I would like you to tell the jury, doctor, something about baldness. Is there more than one type?"

"There are a number of types."

"Do all of them respond equally to treatment?"

"No. Some respond quickly. Some respond not at all."

Dr. Darwin went on to define and describe the various types of baldness.

The district attorney said: "I want you to tell the jury, as impartially as possible, what success you have had treating baldness."

Dr. Darwin answered methodically and at length. He said that, in some cases, he had arrested baldness; in some cases he had made thin hair grow in thicker.

"Science has provided us with certain aids — the proper medicines, knowledge of diet, the violet-ray. But I must confess that I have never yet grown hair satisfactorily on a bald head—that is, a head that is hairless on what we commonly call the dome."

"Have you ever cured a case of congenital, or inherited baldness?"

"Never!"

"If you could lay your hands on such a formula—a formula which would grow hair luxuriously on the baldest head—what would you say such a formula was worth?"

"It would be impossible to estimate the value of such a formula."

"A million dollars?"

"No one but a fool would sell such a formula for such a sum. It is like asking me what a piece of land is worth when I know that by digging into that land I will come upon gold in rich and inexhaustible quantities."

Mr. Redfern: "Then if you owned such a formula, you would consider yourself, potentially, one of the richest men on earth?"

The witness: "Candidly, I would not exchange places with John D. Rockefeller or Henry Ford!"

"Will you step down from the stand a moment, doctor?" Then, to Mr. Hazeltine: "I beg your pardon, Mr. Hazeltine. Will you defer cross-examination for a moment? I wish to have Dr. Darwin examine some specimen types of baldness."

Gillian said grimly: "It's quite all right. I'm tremendously interested."

"With the court's permission," said the prosecutor, "I will call several witnesses to the stand."

Judge Dare granted this permission.

John Redfern: "Will Jonah Jones step here, please?"

THE old beggar who had, for ten years, stood in the doorway of Gillian's office building, came to the stand and was sworn. Since that

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day in September, when Gillian had first remarked upon his new crop of hair, the hair on Jonah Jones's head had grown out long and thick. He was no longer a bald man, or even a slightly bald man.

The old cripple gave his occupation as "salesman," and said that he sold pencils for a living. He gave his age as fifty-eight, and said he had been totally bald since he was thirty. Redfern asked him to identify the pale-purple hair-restorer, and to tell the jury the circumstances under which he had become acquainted with it; which Jonah Jones did.

"What were the results?"

The beggar gave the jury a toothless grin and ducked his head down.

"If necessary," Redfern said, "I can produce a hundred witnesses who will testify that this man was bald for at least ten years to their knowledge. Do you wish this verification, Mr. Hazeltine?"

No; Mr. Hazeltine did not.

Dr. Darwin was now instructed to question Jonah Jones. This he did, and presently announced it as his expert opinion that Jonah Jones had been suffering from hereditary baldness which was, also in his expert opinion, positively incurable.

Other once-bald men were paraded to the witness stand, to be sworn and questioned by the district attorney and the dermatologist. One of them, flushed with embarrassment, was Daniel Melchior, the president of the Greenfield First National. He now had a wonderful crop of hair. Another living demonstration of the purple hair restorer was Mortimer Tait, the broker.

Each of these cases Dr. Darwin pronounced unhesitatingly as a type of baldness hitherto impossible to cure.

Mr. Redfern: "Doctor, if either or all of these men had come to you for baldness treatment, what would you have told them?"

"I would have told them it was impossible to cure their baldness. In fact, I did tell Mr. Melchior so. In spite of it, he insisted on taking treatments."

"And did you sprout any hair on his head?"

"I regret to say I did not sprout a single hair. And I may add that I used every method known to modern science and medicine. That Mr. Melchior has grown this magnificent head of hair is nothing short of miraculous."

"Having examined these men, do you feel free to say that this purple medicine, perfected by Miss Sanford and her brother, is good for baldness?"

"I would certainly not say anything so mild, Mr. Redfern. It is the most wonderful contribution ever made to the science of dermatology."

"Will you reiterate that the holder, or owner, of the formula should amass a fortune from it?"

"Millions! Multi-millions!"

"Thank you, doctor. Do you wish to cross-examine this witness, Mr. Hazeltine?"

Gillian waved his hand in a gesture of carelessness, and the doctor retired.

DALE GENTRY was now called to the stand. As he passed the counsel table his eyes met the accused man's, and he grimly shook his head. His air when he seated himself, after being sworn, was grim, and he fixed the district attorney with eyes which were not friendly.

Redfern said: "Mr. Gentry, are you not engaged in a line of chemical research in the Sanford Chemical Laboratory which, until the time of her death, was jointly owned by Sandra Sanford and the accused?"

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"Yes."

"Just what is your business connection with the accused?"

"It is a rather undefined connection," Dale Gentry said crisply. "When he and Miss Sanford bought the laboratory, a little over two years ago, I was looking for some one to help me work out a formula, or process for manufacturing a synthetic, oil-proof, acid-proof rubber. I met Mr. Sanford through mutual friends, and he said he would like to work on the formula with the view to perfecting it and putting the rubber on the market."

"Would there be a big market for such rubber?"

"A very big market."

"How successful have these experiments been?"

"They have been favorable. We can make the rubber, but the production cost is still prohibitive. Perhaps I should mention that it often takes years to develop such a process as this. For the past eight months we have been at work on means of cutting down this manufacturing cost."

"In your opinion, is the accused a good chemist?"

"Yes, sir. I think he is destined to be one of the leading chemists in America."

"I did not ask you that!"

The witness thinned his lips. "I beg your pardon!" he snapped. "You asked me if he was a good chemist. I answered you."

"You will kindly confine your answers to yes or no. Do you know anything about this hair restorer?"

"Yes or no," the witness said grimly.

The courtroom burst into laughter. When order was restored, Redfern said thinly: "Very well, kindly expand the answer."

"I know very little about the hair restorer."

"Were you aware that the accused was experimenting with formulas for it?"

"Yes. But it was none of my business. It was supposed to be a secret between Miss Sanford and Dwight. I was asked to say nothing about it. Until you called me to your office and asked me about it, I respected their trust."

"Did Miss Sanford, at any time, say anything to you privately about its commercial possibilities?"

"She did. She said she planned to try it out on various types of baldness, first of all, Dwight. If it worked with him, she'd try others. It worked with Dwight, so she tried others. She told me it would make her and Dwight, if it worked, the richest brother and sister in the world."

"In your opinion, is the formula so valuable?"

"Decidedly! Depending, of course, on how it is advertised and merchandized."

MR. REDFERN turned to the bench. "Your honor, I have finished with the taking of this line of testimony. Mr. Hazeltine, do you wish to cross-examine any of these witnesses?"

Mr. Hazeltine: "Not along this line."

Mr. Redfern: "Your honor, to clear up any doubts which may exist, I have introduced this testimony to support my contention that the accused murdered his sister because of the value—"

Mr. Hazeltine: "Objected to as summation!"

Mr. Redfern: "If the court pleases—"

Mr. Hazeltine: "Your honor, this

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line of testimony so far proves nothing but that this purple hair restorer has a high market value. It in no way implies that the defendant killed his sister!"

Mr. Redfern: "I have been offering evidence on my contention—"

Mr. Hazeltine: "Your honor, I shall prove that four other people had motives equally strong for killing Sandra Sanford! This man"—he shook a fist at the district attorney—"is defying every rule of decent—"

The Court: "Gentlemen! I will have no fighting in this court!"

Mr. Redfern: "I am merely defending my rights, your honor. This courtroom trickster—"

The Court: "Silence!"

Mr. Redfern: "Will the court rule on the objection?"

The Court: "It is overruled."

Gillian vigorously argued the point. When, in spite of his arguments, the ruling held, he took exception. And when the exception had been noted, thereby giving him possible grounds for retrial, if necessary, he dramatically demanded that a juror be withdrawn.

This would have meant a mistrial. Gillian wanted a new trial. He wanted time. The purple hair restorer was too much for him.

His petition was denied. Court was now recessed for lunch.

During recess, Gillian, with Jane Wilder, visited Dwight in his cell.

Gillian said angrily: "You should have told me about this damned hair restorer. It's going to be a death's-head at the feast. Do you think that jury will listen to other testimony with that hanging in the air? All that big money talk has them dazzled and dazed. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't think it was important, Gillian."

"I didn't either," Jane said.

"Oh, you knew about it, too?"

"Of course, I knew about it!"

"Why didn't either of you tell me about it?"

Dwight answered: "It was supposed to be a secret, anyway. Sandra and I had sworn to keep it a secret. So had Dale. They pried it out of him after they got it out of that vet. I never dreamed it would come up. Is it really so dangerous?"

Gillian sighed wearily. "A child playing with a box of matches in a powder magazine is safer."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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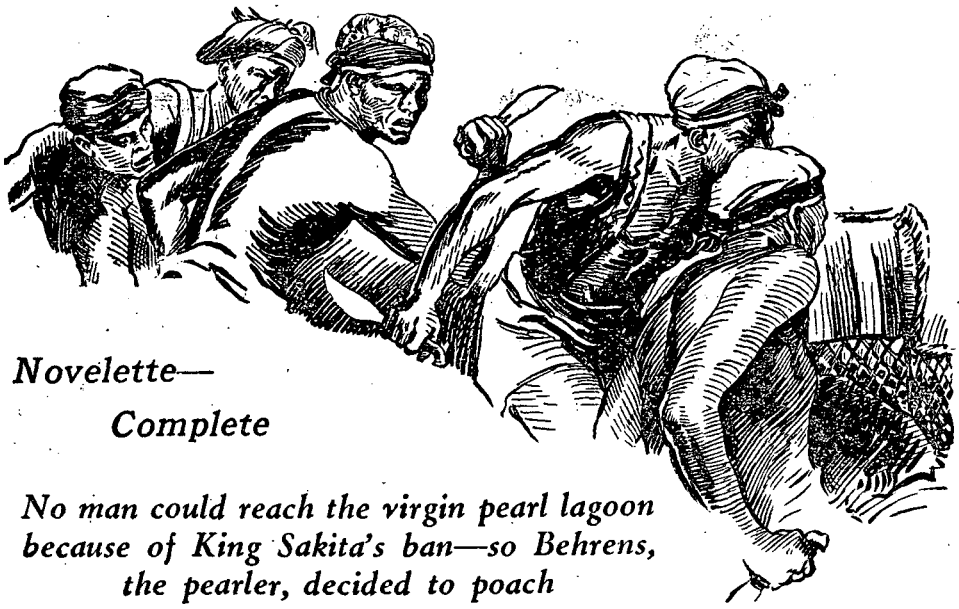

Novelette—
Complete

No man could reach the virgin pearl lagoon because of King Sakita's ban—so Behrens, the pearler, decided to poach

The Stained Tabu

By ANTHONY RUD

Author of "White Fires," "The Marked Deuce," etc.

CHAPTER I.

KING OF THE FLORES.

"THE first year's stores are below. I'll have them ashore for you by sundown." Jimmy Carlin spoke slowly, for the Buginngoko of the Burdett Islands is tricky on the tongue. He extended the pen-written sheet and his own fountain pen. He had read aloud the agreement, which was brief and inscribed both in English and in the vernacular of the islands.

"Sit down and make a mark—here," he invited, indicating the space at the bottom.

"No," said the little brown man in the serang.

He remained standing, his coffee-colored eyes holding those of the surprised Jimmy Carlin in what seemed a gaze of wistful sorrow.

Jimmy caught his breath. There was no evading the finality in the voice of King Sakita. And save for queer rules enforced in a spasm occurring about once a decade by the Portuguese of Timor, the decisions of Sakita were obeyed unquestioningly and always by the inhabitants of forty-odd flyspeck islands scattered in the Flores Sea.

The inhabitants of those scattered islands numbered less than two thousand, for a curse had fallen upon them. Always these coral atolls had been poor; but life was easy enough as long as edible fish swam in the sea. Of late years, for a reason unknown to man, the fish had become poisonous. The subjects of King Sakita starved slowly—or died suddenly with distended

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Around his bed were small, half-naked men, each holding a drawn parang!

bellies and blue patches on the skin.

Not always, of course. Sometimes for a few weeks the fish were all right, then suddenly they would make deathly ill or kill every one who ate. It could not be explained on the basis of spawning season, either; and so actual starvation had come to the Burdetts.

"You realize wh-what you're saying?" demanded Jimmy, stammering slightly and paling beneath his layers of salt-cured bronze. "I was given to understand that you agreed. I have brought five hundred cases of steelhead salmon, five hundred cases of red whale meat, six barrels of nigger twist—"

The little brown man stiffened. He held up one hand in dignified gesture. "I do not make bargains with liars," he explained simply.

Now Jimmy reddened more swiftly than his color had ebbed. "Explain that, Sakita!" he demanded sharply. "When have I ever lied to you or treated one of yours unjustly?"

"Never," admitted the little king. His slanted eyes narrowed with a gleam of anger, however. "You held back part of the truth, though. You did not tell me that you bargained not for yourself, but for another. A man I hate and shall kill!" he ended.

That was a stiff blow. Jimmy's eyes fell, and bitter curses welled up in his heart. But then he gained control of himself and arose quietly.

"How did you know I came here in behalf of Behrens?" he asked.

For a long moment the slanted eyes looked scornful. Sakita smiled bitterly.

"When that one"—he spat overside—"comes to the Flores Sea, the word is brought to me. Now he is waiting on Tubu-Muna, at the grove where my people worked for you in cutting and drying the copra—in the days when you were an honorable man and feared not to tell the whole truth."

This was making a terrible thing out of what had been no more than a

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choice of evils—for Sakita, who would have no choice. Jimmy did not feel guilty at heart. He had accepted the help of Rudolph Behrens long before he as much as suspected that the man was other than he seemed, a pearler and island trader grown rich through lucky finds, and inclined to generosity and kind-heartedness toward young men not so lucky.

BUT Sakita had seen the whole net of intrigue as if Jimmy himself had known it from the first. In fact, as if Jimmy himself had suggested this method of trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the island chieftain.

Something would have to be done about it at once. Sakita had been a good friend to Jimmy two years before the "Cock-eyed Bob" had howled up out of the Indian Ocean, to bring ruin to his little plantation on Tubu-Muna.

"Look here, Sakita, I'm not threatening. In a way I'm damned glad that you saw through my little pretense. I hate appearing to lie. But do you realize that Behrens can ruin you once and for all—and will surely do so if he discovers he can't make a profit out of your pearl lagoon?"

"All he must do is inform the Portuguese at Timor. I know," nodded Sakita. "They will swarm down hungrily, violate tabus, snatch, steal—and destroy any of mine who dare protest. Very well, let it happen. I shall not bargain with Behrens!"

With flashing eyes and a swirl of his rich serang, King Sakita turned to the rail. He gestured, and two broad-shouldered brown men with the high cheek bones of purer Malays stood up in the stern of the long proa.

Sakita placed one hand on the rail and vaulted into their waiting arms. As he seated himself with dignity, the long, narrow sailing canoe drifted from Jimmy's anchored schooner. Then a lateen sail bellied in the breeze, and the swift proa departed. King Sakita did not glance backward.

Jimmy Carlin turned away, growling an order to his flat-faced boatswain. This then was the end. Complete ruin, an end of the last chance to repay Rudolph Behrens, and what was worse, a reputation for treachery. The little brown potentate had been a friend.

Well, he was done with Behrens. Even when the elder man took over the schooner, the ruined plantation, and everything else Jimmy owned, there still would be the debt of more than one thousand English pounds.

Jimmy would give him a note, and then devote his life to repaying. What chance would a beach comber have, though? In these latitudes white men either held absolute authority in their little spheres, or else they were the lowest of the low.

"All that is a trifle," gritted Jimmy to himself. "The worst is the smirch on honor—because I half earned it! Wonder what that wily devil Behrens ever did to Sakita, anyhow?"

CHAPTER II.

DEGREES OF DISHONOR.

HER hatches filled to the covers with canned salmon, the beef-like whale meat (which tastes more fishy than fish), black, braided tobacco in barrels, bolts of flowered calico, and cases of a rather superior gin, the twenty-four ton schooner Kota Baroe threaded the channels amid the thick-dotted islands and atolls

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of the Sea of Flowers. Breezes were light and fitful. The Kota Baroe made no more than three to four knots steerage way.

From the southeast, pursuing at twice the schooner's rate, came a single-outrigger proa, single sail leaning, and a tiny white wishbone in the teeth of its slender bow. Hopeful for a second that this might be King Sakita, come to admit handsomely that he had been carried away by wrath, and had blamed his white friend more than justly, Jimmy got binoculars from their case and studied the flying canoe. Then he shook his head. This was a smaller proa, holding only four figures. It did not interest him.

An hour later, though, he learned that the four brown men in the little vessel sought him. The canoe drew abreast, and a high-pitched voice called his name.

Jimmy recognized the man, and somewhat reluctantly gave the order to heave to. This was a cousin of Sakita, who was the minor chief of three small islands. A far different sort of man—probably with some Chinese blood tincturing the Javanese and Bugi, since there was a decided yellow cast to his skin. A lazy, pudgy fellow, Jimmy recalled, from copra days. A schemer, whose sense of proprieties was adaptable, as long as he himself ate and drank of the best. He bore the name of Gunong Api.

Now, Gunong Api had no difficulty climbing over the rail. He was thirty pounds leaner than when Jimmy last had seen him; and the enforced banting on his starvation islands had not increased his handsomeness. He looked lean, crafty, mean, even when he bowed in ceremonial greeting to Jimmy, and spoke the flowered phrases of the court language—a stilted lingo abandoned at once, when there was any business to be done.

From the first, Jimmy sensed something evil. For that reason he made no move to entertain Gunong Api, but met him at the rail with a nod for the ceremonials, and then a curt question in Bugi-ngoko.

"Why is my poor vessel thus honored?"

Gunong Api smirked, and Jimmy saw the Chinese in him more plainly. Biting down on the stern of his brier, Jimmy leaned on the rail and waited, wondering what could be in the wind. He had nothing now to lose—nothing save self-respect and honor, that is. And it slowly developed that these were just the intangible commodities in which Gunong Api intended to traffic!

"It was brought to my ears that disaster must come to the Flores," said the Bugi, with a sorrowful shake of his head. The beady eyes gleamed watchfully, though. "My cousin, the great Sakita, has allowed his pride to come before the welfare of his people. Now, Tuan Behrens will be angry. The Portuguese will come. For us will be *tapu ailong—e mate!* (Broken tabus—death.)"

"And so you're going to do something about it, eh?" mused Jimmy, frowning. "Well, what?"

"You have almost all the stores for the consummation of the agreement—even a new agreement!" suggested Gunong Api suavely.

"Eh?" asked Jimmy, starting erect. "How do you mean, almost? If Sakita had been willing—"

"Ah, but he is not willing! All on account of that *wahine*, his one-mother sister, who went willingly with Behrens."

"So that was it," nodded Jimmy

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He knew the fierce loyalty to motherkin, even among these polygamists. Behrens, it seemed, had lived with a brown girl, and unfortunately she had been the real sister to Sakita. Well, Jimmy did not like that practice, but it had been very common, out here where there were no white women at all. Behrens sank no lower because of it than hundreds of his own kind of white skin. After all, the girl had been related to royalty; she doubtless had been small, beautiful in a miniature way, and silly enough to pride herself on a white mate.

GUNONG API shrugged. He went on, admitting that he cared not at all concerning the fate of the *wahine,* even though she had been related to him. It was most unfortunate, though, that she had disclosed to Behrens the secret of the tabu island, and the untouched pearl beds that lay between it and the barrier reef.

"That's how he learned," nodded Jimmy grimly. The girl had been a fool, he thought. Long ago the predecessors of Sakita had learned their bitter lesson from white men. The latter would kill a hundred natives for the sake of one large pearl, and think the exchange of blood for beauty justified. For decades, then, the islanders had hidden or kept secret any pearl bed, fearing the coming of the swarms of whites in their little eight-ton schooners; the destruction and death they left in their wake.

Sakita had been wise indeed. He had ordained a tabu on the little island where the virgin pearl bed lay. That meant he had moved the handful of inhabitants elsewhere, and decreed death to any one who set foot there again. Knowledge even of the pearl bed quickly died in the natives. It had been kept only by the royalty.

Behrens had been afraid to poach, for that would have brought Sakita with all the fighting men he commanded, and almost certain death. In this time of widespread poisoning and starvation, though, he had guessed that Sakita would lift the tabu for a fortnight each season, in exchange for food supplies sufficient to bridge the times of starvation in each year. And that Sakita would have done, had it not been for the information that Jimmy Carlin acted not for himself but for the one man in the world Sakita hated most!

Gunong Api professed himself a realist. His royal cousin had blundered. Pride was all right in its way; but when it led to destruction it was a fault. Why should all the others suffer because Sakita mourned the fate of one forgotten *wahine?*

"So, suppose you get around to it," suggested Jimmy Carlin, tapping out his brier on the rail. "You have an idea, I take it?"

"Ah, yes. I plan to make the same bargain with you—with Tuan Behrens—which was refused," he stated, with calm effrontery. "You will pay me the canned salmon and other things, later. First you will make me a payment of something else."

"And what is the something else?"

"Twenty rifles with brass ammunition!" said Gunong Api. "With those my men can stay out of range of the sumpitans and overcome the warriors of my foolish cousin. Then the agreement will be carried through, the Portuguese will not come, the tabu on the pearl island will be lifted for a fortnight each year, and we will have food, tobacco and gin for the times the fish are bad!"

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"I see," said Jimmy, restraining the ire that was rising in him. "Then you —er—will take the place of Sakita, I suppose?"

Gunong Api smiled and shrugged. "If I am successful, and it is the will of my people—" he began pompously.

"Well, I won't have any hand in it! Get out!" said Jimmy suddenly. "Damn you for a slimy scoundrel! Get back into that canoe, or—"

A shout of alarm from Kuria, his own boatswain, brought Jimmy up short as he raised a fist in threat. The Malay was standing near the anchor chain, petrified with sudden terror.

OUT of the tail of his eye Jimmy saw the reason. The three Bugis down in the proa had lifted sumpitans! Two of them aimed at Jimmy himself, while the other trained his long blowtube on Kuria!

Quick as thought Jimmy dropped to the deck, and the two poisoned darts sped over the rail to fall harmlessly in the sea beyond. Jimmy caught the slender brown ankles of Gunong Api, lifted, and heaved. The plotting assassin went head first over the side with a wild scream, splashing into the water and immediately being clutched by one of his men. The proa drifted away, with one of the brown men setting the lateen sail.

A shouting came from the four members of his crew. Jimmy scrambled along on hands and feet a few yards, before ducking up his head for a quick glance. Then he stood erect. The proa was now beyond blowtube range, and something terrible had happened aft.

Jimmy let out an exclamation of rage. There, back against the capstan, slumped Kuria, hopelessness in every line of his figure. As Jimmy reached him he plucked forth a feathered dart from his upper arm.

Jimmy sat down on the deck, jerked off his shoes, and yanked the laces out of them. With these and the handle of his knife he fashioned a rude tourniquet, which he swiftly applied to Kuria's arm above the wound. Then, calling for another knife from one of the brown sailors, he slashed down into the wound until red blood welled. Put-

JIMMY CARLIN

ting his lips to the cut, he sucked and spat. Perhaps there was a chance to save a life.

At fifteen-minute intervals he loosed the tourniquet for half a minute, immediately tightening it again. He called for a bottle of gin from his own cabinet, and gave Kuria two-ounce doses of this straight. The native lapsed into languor, occasionally groaning feebly. But when an hour had passed, Kuria was still alive, and sweat stood out in great beads on his skin.

"He will live now, I think," decided Jimmy, removing the tourniquet. He upended the gin bottle, to wash out the taste of blood and blowgun poison from his own mouth. "Where did that rat, Gunong Api, go?"

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Silently one of the sailors, his eyes still round with the miracle of recovery from sumpitan dart poison, pointed to the north. The proa was no more than a tiny dot on the horizon, bound on the very course Jimmy himself would lay.

"Naturally he would go to Behrens, damn him!" swore Jimmy Carlin. "The swine will get there hours before we possibly can. There'll be hell to pay!"

CHAPTER III.

BETRAYED.

SURPRISINGLY, now that he realized that Behrens had made a pawn of him in a dirty game of deception, Jimmy Carlin could call to mind many incidents which showed a seamy side to the character of Rudolph Behrens.

While a strong sense of gratitude had obscured his judgment, Jimmy had been blind to incidents that testified to what the Dutch called *schlimm* traits in his employer.

That time he refused to go to the assistance of Bennett, on Tofoi Isle, when the trader was besieged by a whole tribe run amok on contraband *bhang*.

Jimmy himself had been away at the time. It was only months later that he heard the circumstances; and then Behrens had a far different version.

Now as the Kota Baroe neared the island of Tubu-Muna at sunset, Jimmy Carlin was in the bow with binoculars, searching grimly for sight of the proa. It was not in evidence—though that did not mean much, as there were two other harbors possible to light craft on Tubu-Muna. Jimmy did not waste time to reconnoiter.

Lowering a skiff, taking one of the Malays, he made for the broad beach. Through the brush, beyond the few slanted palms left by the screaming wind which had ruined his plantation, he discerned the thatched roof of his repaired bungalow. No lights as yet. No sign of human beings. He leaped out into the shallow water, strode to the white beach, and made his way inland.

His heart was throbbing in his throat. Had Gunong Api managed to state his treacherous case well enough so that Behrens had given him the guns and ammunition—perhaps even taken Behrens's own smaller schooner and started on a murderous raid which would overthrow Sakita and open the way to a rape of the tabu island and its bed of pearl oysters?

Behrens evidently had been told of the schooner's arrival. He emerged to the screened *lanai* just as Jimmy came. Behrens was freshly tubbed and dressed in whites.

His face was ruddy, with that faint purplish cast which tells of self-indulgence in the tropics; and he scowled at sight of Jimmy.

"I have heard of your failure," he said in greeting. "Gunong Api has been here. What the devil got into you, anyhow?"

He slammed back the screen door irritably so it banged. Jimmy entered, and tossed aside his pith helmet.

"Has that rat gone?" he demanded curtly.

"Gunong? Why, yes. He seemed in a good deal of a hurry—didn't wait longer than to ask me if I'd give him twenty guns. Naturally I'm no such damn fool. He'd start no end of trouble, and prob'ly end by turning the guns on us. Treacherous devil. But, come and have a spot and tell me what

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in hell happened. I thought you said that deal with Sakita was in the bag?"

FOR the space of three heart-beats Jimmy stared, all his wrath against Behrens oozing out of him. The man seemed natural—a trifle upset, of course, because Sakita had not let himself be outmaneuvered, but not unreasonably so. Jimmy found himself arguing inwardly for the man who had helped him.

Behrens, after all, had been offering an honest exchange to Sakita. A fortnight of diving each year—the oysters to be rotted elsewhere—and in return for the shell and a problematical number of pearls, provisions and drink worth a full four thousand American dollars each year.

"It was all right, and a sealed bargain—except while I was getting the canned goods, Sakita heard from one of his agents around here," said Jimmy, dropping into a deck chair and helping himself to gin and limes. "That spilled the beans."

"It seems you had the nerve to run away with Sakita's one-mother sister, some years ago," he ended grimly.

"Oh, hell!" growled Behrens. "Yes, that's true enough. But I treated her decent. *She* never complained! I didn't have even a hunch that Sakita gave a damn, till one time he sent a hundred of his blowgun artists after me; one time I'd anchored near. And he still cherishes that grudge, eh? I hoped he'd forgotten by now, but I sent you so's not to take any unnecessary chances."

Put in that fashion, especially since he had dismissed Gunong Api in a hurry, the trouble did not seem very important to Jimmy Carlin. Sakita, of course, made a fetish of family honor; but he would have felt just as disgraced had Behrens married the brown *wahine* that long time ago. It was a matter of keeping the royal strain pure, more than any abstract morality.

"I've made up my mind to something," said Jimmy nevertheless. "I'm going to make out a note for what I owe you, and slide out for Broome. Maybe I can get a schooner for the season, and make a start at repaying you?"

"What?" Behrens scowled. "Why the hell should you be dissatisfied, huh? I promised you a quarter of the profits on this agreement—"

"Which I didn't put across," Jimmy finished for him. "It finished me with Sakita, too. Oh-h, I don't suppose I could explain it, but I'm through. You've been mighty good to me, but I've got to get out on my own—and in a different part. I've always played square, but just according to the way Sakita feels now I'll always have a dirty mark against my record. And I don't like the idea of that.

"Wait! I'm not blaming you—much. It's just that things have broken all wrong. And I couldn't stand it, having them all saying that I was here just to do your dirty work for you!"

He got up, tossed the remnant of his nightcap drink, and went to his own chamber.

"Aw, hell. Get a good sleep and you'll feel different," came Behrens's careless adjuration through the thin walls.

But the elder man's face was set and ugly. Losing an agent known for his personal squareness would be a harsh blow to him. The time had passed when Behrens himself could trade personally in the Flores Sea. Still scowling, he got up and opened a fresh bottle of gin to take with him to bed.

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It was past midnight, with no sound on the island save the faint roar and resurge of surf on the outer reef, and the fainter whine of monsoon through the pom-poms of the few remaining palms.

Two proas came silently and furtively to Tubu-Muna. The first was hurriedly beached, as its four occupants seized long packages and carried them up the beach to be hidden in the grass. Then the four men hid themselves, each one holding a level Winchester rifle.

The second proa held nine small brown figures. They did not hurry, but carried one of their number through the shallow water. Then they melted out of white moonlight, to the checkered shadows of the brush, moving toward the thatched bungalow on the other side of the island.

It was Behrens's habit to go to bed well soaked in alcohol, then to wake up on the average of each two hours, take a long gurgle of gin from the bottle on the floor at the side of his bed, and go back to sleep. Thus far he had not been troubled with horrid visions—pink elephants and azure camels—though his nerves were jumpy and troublesome when he was forced to delay his usual stimulant.

NOW he awoke with a start, and blinked. Surely this must be what men feared when they spoke of tremens! Here around his bed were small, half-naked men, each holding a drawn parang! From the stern expressions of their countenances there could be no doubt at all of their readiness to do murder!

Behrens's hand went automatically for his bottle. But midway it froze.

"Get up!" bade one of the little brown men.

And with a sudden shiver Rudolph Behrens recognized King Sakita, brother of the *wahine* the white man had stolen years ago—and strangled when he tired of her!

Rudolph Behrens had courage. Wakened thus, however, and needing a drink—or believing he did, at any rate—he was far from at his best. Shaking, his teeth chattering, he got his bare feet to the floor and stood on them, although his knees smote together. He was certain death was coming, but there was nothing he could do. Nothing save fall down and beg—and even Behrens scorned that. With the parang pricking his back he let himself stumble into the adjoining room. There Sakita faced him.

"I had sworn to kill you, Tuan Behrens," said the little brown potentate, without preamble. "I should have waited, though, until you transgressed in my territory again.

"But trouble has driven me here. I have decided either to kill you, or to exact the most sacred promise of white men from you."

"Promise?" shivered Behrens. "I'll promise anything!"

"And *keep* that promise—if it means never telling a living soul that there are pearl oysters in the lagoon of my tabu island?" The native's voice was stern.

"And *keep* that—" began Behrens with vehemence.

Outside the latticed windows sounded a high-pitched snarl. Gunong Api had crept up with his three renegades, and had heard how his cousin was emerging from his dilemma with success and honor. It was too much for Gunong Api. He snarled a command to his three men.

Rifles spat. The fire and smoke knifed through the lattice. No matter that these natives were unaccustomed

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to rifles; even they could not miss at four paces distance!

Two of the nine natives dropped without sound. The figure of Sakita staggered and spun half around. One other of his men screamed and caught at his neck, which geysered red.

Behrens, eyes bulging with surprise and horror, still saw his opportunity. He sprang upon the staggering king, and bore the latter sidewise to the

KING SAKITA

floor. Above them came the click-clack of lever ejectors, and then a second volley of death.

A moment earlier than this, Jimmy Carlin had been awakened by voices. He leaped out of bed, knowing that no one here spoke Bugi-ngoko except in dealings with island natives. And just then he glimpsed four skulking figures draw up to the windows of the next wing of the bungalow, where Behrens's room was located.

Reaching for his own pistol, shoving in a filled clip, cocking it, he opened the lattice shutter of his own window and slid down to the ground, crouching in the dark. Then he crept forward. Something strange and sinister was happening, and he meant to have a hand in it.

The first volley through the shutters into the room lighted only by the single low-turned lamp caught Jimmy incredulous. He gasped, yet still hesitated to turn loose his own automatic. At whom were these men firing? And who *were* they?

He let go one shot over the heads of the four riflemen, and simultaneously their second volley spattered raggedly. With yells, probably unaware of Jimmy's existence, they reversed the rifles, and smashed in two of the shutters, leaping through.

Amazed, catching sight just too late of the renegade Gunong Api, Jimmy Carlin cried out a warning to Behrens, and climbed through into the smoke-wreathed room.

Shots reverberated, and orange tongues darted. On the floor at Jimmy's feet was his little friend, Sakita, with Behrens choking the life out of him.

Two brown men, drunk with slaughter, and now swinging their hot rifles, got in Jimmy's way. One of them aimed a blow at Sakita—or, possibly, at Behrens; it was hard to tell which.

The automatic leaped twice in Jimmy's hand, and the two islanders staggered away. Jimmy grabbed Behrens by the throat with his left hand, and yanked. The big man came up from the floor, but his small antagonist came also. The grip on Sakita's throat did not loosen.

"Let go! Are you crazy?" cried Jimmy, but Behrens paid no heed.

There was nothing for it. Jimmy raised his pistol, and brought down the barrel sharply on Behrens's skull. His sharp tug then was rewarded. Behrens went limp, and Sakita fell back to the floor.

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Instantly one of the king's own band darted forward, seized his senseless body, and ran for it. Three others of the original nine also fled. With screams, and two explosions of unaimed rifles, the remaining pair of assassins took after their prey.

One stopped at the doorway, though. A grinning leer of hate and balked fury on his lean visage, he threw level his Winchester. A shot crashed—just as Jimmy bent forward to turn Behrens to his back.

Gunong Api had got his revenge for manhandling.

Something struck glancingly across the back of Jimmy's neck, just where it joined his skull. He sprawled over the heavy man's body, knocked out as completely as if by a hurtling sandbag.

CHAPTER IV.

CODE OF THE SAVAGE.

THOUGH Jimmy Carlin had been terribly jarred at exactly the point where the brain is most vulnerable to shock, and knew it not, the long flying-proa with King Sakita and the remnant of his followers, made its escape.

The riflemen who pursued did not attempt to launch their own craft, since it could be outsailed from the start. They came back to the bungalow, where Gunong Api now was in charge. He handed each a full bottle of white man's gin.

These were received with howls of delight. Rudolph Behrens, who was sitting up, drenching his innards with the needed stimulant, paid no heed.

He was getting more ugly with each passing moment, and stared with a lowering scowl at the bound and still unconscious Jimmy Carlin on the floor at his feet.

"You can't have him. Not now," Behrens snarled to his brown confederate. "He sloughed me, an' I don't take that from anybody. Damn prissy fool. Well, he's got plenty comin' now!"

"I will cut out his heart!" spat Gunong Api.

"You will?" asked Behrens, though without denial. He chuckled hoarsely. "There might be somep'n in that, at that. But not now, not now.

"I think we'll all make for that tabu island right off at sunup. I got a grand idea. It'll"—he hiccuped—"it'll work two ways for me. Blood—white man's blood—breaks one of your damn tabus, doesn't it?"

In spite of himself, Gunong shivered. "The blood of any outlander stains a tabu," he answered, with involuntarily lowered voice. In spite of his chicanery, he had all the superstitions of his race. A tabu, though laid by a king or a priest, was supposed to be just as powerful as if laid down in some hoary epoch of the past by one of the fish or air divinities. Even the king or priest had to obey the tabu, as long as it was in force!

Behrens chortled. "Well, that looksh shwell to me!" he croaked, gasping for breath, his speech growing thick with the assault of a full fifth of proof gin atop his potations of the evening. "Two nigger babies with one basheball! You take 'm an' cut his heart out—on the island. That breaksh damn tabu, an' I can dive f'r oyshtersh any time...longsh I want!"

Chuckling, breathing hoarsely, he lurched up, caught the limp bound body of Jimmy Carlin by the collar, and dragged him into the adjoining bedroom, locking the door. Sprawling

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head first across his rumpled bed, Rudolph Behrens snored.

THE Kota Baroe did not sail at sunup. At the broiling hot hour of eleven Rudolph Behrens still slumbered, snoring away the worst debauch of his many years in the island.

In the living room of the bungalow dead men, wounded and drunken lay sprawled together. Even Gunong Api had not been able to resist the chance at a free hand with the white man's store of gin. He lay in the doorway of the veranda, mouth open, when finally Rudolph Behrens, eyes bloodshot and in an evil temper, came to kick him awake at noon.

Jimmy Carlin had passed the first stages of nausea and blinding headache. He lay in a semi-stupor, bound, and suffering from blood flashes across his field of vision each time he opened his eyes to daylight.

Almost the first act of Behrens was to come, glower down without speaking, and then stride away abruptly, yelling savagely for a couple of the houseboys. Then Jimmy was lifted, carried down to his own schooner, and thrown, still bound, into the empty cubbyhole of the lazarette. The door slammed and was padlocked. He was in pitch darkness.

Another hour dragged past. Then, muffled by intervening timbers, came familiar sounds—the creak of rigging. The *hauw-urrr, hauw-urrr* of an anchor chain, and then the tensing of mast steppings as the Kota Baroe heeled slightly and fled with the fringe of monsoon.

Jimmy had regained the ability to think clearly; but the entire proceeding seemed like a nightmare to him. Had Behrens gone stark crazy with drink? The only alternative was even less promising. The trader had succumbed to the arguments of the renegade Gunong Api. Taking a chance to murder King Sakita, Behrens and his brown-skinned confederate now were on a foray. They would swoop down upon the islands, with the weight of guns overpower resistance, and enthrone Gunong Api. Then Behrens would claim the pearl bed—probably the whole tabu island off where it lay.

"Wonder what his kind thought is for me!" reflected Jimmy. He could scarcely believe that Behrens contemplated murder, since the killing of white men was held by Portuguese, Dutch and English authorities alike as appalling lese majesty, as well as an ordinary crime. How keep white control of these teeming millions if white men were shown to be mortals instead of demigods with powerful *manas?*

Still, he could scarcely let Jimmy Carlin escape. The young man had made a name for himself in these waters; and even now there is no chance for a weakling to win respect. A deep and abiding anger, the slow and relentless wrath of a man so sure of himself he never has needed to bully or swagger, was glowing in the forge of his mind.

The air in the lazarette was stuffy, laden with ancient smells, growing steadily poorer in oxygen. Jimmy had begun to thirst. It surely must be late afternoon again. The Kota Baroe must be nearing her destination, if indeed his guess had been right.

Then came a rattling of the padlock, a rasp, and the door swung open. The first figure was that of Behrens. He carried a pistol, and from the swaying of his walk Jimmy saw instantly that the man had sought a cure for shakiness in a whole tuft of hairs from the dog that bit him.

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"Grub and water—though you don't deserve it!" he said harshly. "Come in, Kuria; but no funny business, or I'll smear the two of you!" He waggled the automatic, and backed against a wall of the cubbyhole.

"You're laying up treasures in hell, don't you know it, Behrens?" demanded Jimmy hotly. "What d'you think I'm going to do to *you* when I get out of here?"

BEHRENS snarled. He stank sourly of gin perspiration, and his breath was worse. "I'll leave it to you—you're a religious fella, an' think about the hereafter!" he retorted. "One thing sure. You won't be mixing in what don't concern you quite so damn much, once Gunong Api gets through with you!"

BEHRENS

The brown boatswain, the man Jimmy had saved from the results of the sumpitan poison, went down on one knee. His flat, high cheekboned face was impassive; but the coal black eyes burned into Jimmy's. They seemed to be trying to convey an imperative message.

Jimmy put his lips to the tin cup Kuria extended, and drank deeply of tepid water. All the while he was watching the native, but not guessing what Kuria was trying to say with his eyes.

Rudolph Behrens was watching so closely that anything like a whisper, or any words framed by the lips, even, were out of the question.

In his other hand Kuria bore a mess kit partly filled with a stew made of shark meat boiled with cassava. It was unsalted, but Jimmy ate ravenously from the wooden spoon which Kuria filled time and time again.

"All right, get out now!" snarled Behrens impatiently, prodding the native with the muzzle of his weapon.

Kuria obeyed. Yet the tingle of that magnetic black gaze remained with Jimmy, even when Behrens slammed the door and clicked shut the padlock on the hasp. What in the world could the boatswin have been trying to put across? Merely an expression of his own sympathy and loyalty?

No, Jimmy took that sort of thing for granted. He had always treated his native crews justly and well. They had been respectful, even eager in obeying his slightest commands—and that is an unusual trait in Malays and Lascars.

Jimmy relaxed on his side, his arms one huge ache that crossed his shoulder blades and traversed the small of his back.

Eh! What was *that?* Under his right hip now was something long and hard. He hunched around, got his fingers on it—and breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. It was a sailor's claspknife, one of the huge affairs that clicks out with a folding hilt, and which cannot be closed except by pressure of a release button.

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Kuria had not been able to perform any sleight of hand. The man must have walked into the lazarette, carrying it clasped in his toes!

CHAPTER V.

BLOOD OF A WHITE MAN.

THE pinpoint isle of Gaba Moa, unnamed even by the few Bugis who once inhabited it—until the tabu lent it importance among Sakita's followers—came in sight just before sundown. On the schooner were Gunong Api and his one remaining rifleman. Rudolph Behrens, half drunk as always, but at his best pitch of efficiency for that reason, strode the deck, keeping in submission the crew of Malays and Lascars whose sullen faces betokened the wrath inside them at what had happened to Jimmy Carlin.

To a man these eight disliked and distrusted Behrens, and he knew it. Against the Bugis, though, if Sakita managed to get home and load a dozen proas with his blowtube warriors, they would fight like slashing fiends. And that was all, beyond the handling of the schooner, that Behrens wanted of them.

Abruptly a disagreement burst forth. Gunong Api doubtless had overlooked the manner in which he was putting himself wholly in the power of his confederate—though it is certain Rudolph Behrens had not slighted that feature. Now the native demurred at going immediately to an anchorage off Gaba Moa.

"Let us proceed for Atee," he urged, scowling as he named one of the island dots over which he held subchieftainship, and where he could expect to pick up a bodyguard of followers. "Once we have more men with rifles, then Sakita cannot bother us."

"Yeah?" grinned Behrens. "All in good time. I'm not takin' any, my own self, fella. First off we do things my way—then yours. Once that tabu is stained and busted, even *you* can't keep me from my chance at that pearl bed!

"Oh, *I'll* keep the agreement, don't you worry. An' you'll be rid of the white man who threw you overboard." His manner made it plain that he trusted Gunong Api, the renegade, not at all. Which was natural enough, but reduced the latter to a silent, teeth-gnashing fury.

With the Kota Baroe anchored above the virgin pearl beds, Behrens spent the last half hour of daylight scanning the low shore, with its fringe of bent and wind-ravaged palms. King Sakita just possibly might have anticipated his coming.

The little brown ruler might have gathered his subjects hastily and come to dispute any landing on the tabu island of his tribe. However, there was not the slightest sign of life on the deserted place.

"All serene," said Behrens with satisfaction, stowing away his binoculars. "Kuria, you and a couple others come with me. Have others lower the dinghy. Tuan Carlin goes ashore with us—and stays there!" He ended with a chuckle of grim significance. "Got your parang honed good and sharp, Gunong?" he went on after a moment. "I wouldn't want any torture, you know..."

The renegade nodded briefly. He was greenish about his mouth corners, where his lips compressed. The white fool did not understand what this shore trip meant to him, Gunong Api. The killing was good, though that could be

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done just as well aboard the schooner. But the tabu still held! It was death, supposedly, for Gunong himself to step ashore on the island!

"I shall break the tabu instantly," he reflected, attempting to reassure himself. He shivered, nevertheless, as he put forward this same flimsy argument to his one remaining rifle-armed follower, who showed signs of panic at thought of landing.

Behrens, Kuria, and two Malays came down to the lazarette. The white man scowled when he encountered the burning hatred of Jimmy's glance, but bent down, roughly throwing the supposedly helpless captive to his face, and giving the bonds at wrists, knees and ankles separate yanks.

The cords seemed tight-drawn and safe. The boatswain, watching, slowly paled to a sickly tan. Jimmy Carlin saw. When he had a moment of opportunity, being lifted, he winked broadly at the native. Whether or not Kuria understood was problematical. The knife, however, was not there on the floor; he could tell that much.

MATTERS came to a swift climax then. Bundling Jimmy into the dinghy, filling it with members of the crew till the gunwales were within inches of the wind-raddled waters of the harbor, Behrens, Gunong Api, and the one rifle carrier rowed toward the island on which it was death to set foot.

Two lanterns furnished all the illumination save for a rash of stars in the blue-black sky; but the white sands of the beach seemed to gather and hold this faint effulgence as a Welsbach filament holds a glow when the gas flame is extinguished. Choppy little waves begun and ended inside the barrier reef, slapped pettishly, their tiny noise a punctuation to the regular *whooom-ahhh!* of the monsoon surf driven all the way from the Banda Sea.

A quarter mile back of the loaded dinghy quick cries of alarm and a scurrying for weapons sounded aboard the Kota Baroe. Then the Malays and Lascars left behind grew silent, crowding to the rail and watching through the dark, as the menace they glimpsed came abreast and passed them.

Behrens and the others in the little craft saw nothing, heard nothing but the wind. Death rode that wind which fanned their backs.

Jimmy Carlin waited grimly. The bonds at his wrists had been cut, then rewound. He could free his hands in a hurry; and the opened claspknife was there in back, under the waistband of his trousers. What could one man do against at least three who carried firearms?

While he was being rowed ashore he sensed that this was some horrible rite —more the idea of Behrens than that of Gunong Api. He was meant to die. Before that happened he would take his slimmest of chances, and get at least one of these—Behrens for choice —before they slaughtered him. But he delayed, holding to the forlorn hope that possibly they simply meant to maroon him on this isle, and let King Sakita kill him for breaking the tabu. Quickly that faint hope was banished.

"Bring him here!" commanded Behrens, striding up the beach and indicating with a wave of his hand a broken bole of royal palm, standing like a forlorn and tipsy ghost in the vague quarter-light.

"You come on, Gunong. We'll tie him to that—so's anybody landing will see the scarecrow—a skeleton scarecrow, ha! ha! Ought to give Sakita the willies, all right! How about it, Jim-

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my? Think you can scare off all the brownies who come?"

Behrens guffawed again at his heartless jest, and Jimmy's jaw set. This, then, was the end. He gathered himself.

"Look out, Kuria!" he suddenly yelled as the boatswain and another came with Gunong Api to carry him to this impromptu stake.

JIMMY freed his wrists, grabbed the knife—which stuck for one appalling second as the hilt caught under the waistband.

Then he made two downward strokes, slicing through the other bonds. He leaped away, staggering as he felt a lack of control of the numbed members.

A shot crashed. Missed. Jimmy whirled, feeling the singe of burnt powder across his scalp.

Click-clack. Gunong Api was loading again, and his companion with a rifle was jostled as he tried to get into position to fire. Cries came from Kuria and a Lascar, as they leaped upon this second assassin, parangs flashing in the light of the lanterns.

Slash! *Kttt!* Jimmy cut and stabbed the renegade, who loosed a howl of agony. A howl that ended in a bubbling sound as Gunong Api slumped forward to writhe on the white sands turning crimson-black under him.

Swearing horribly, Behrens flung up his pistol and fired from a distance of ten paces. Jimmy had seen. He flung himself forward and down, piling atop the body of Gunong Api, and wrenching the loaded Winchester from that death grasp.

In three seconds, momentarily expecting the thudding impact of Rudolph Behrens's second bullet in his back, Jimmy had the weapon and swung about on his knees, ready for his chief enemy.

But something else had come. Scudding swiftly for the shore, their lateen sails full-bellied even as they came at speed for the shore which must damage the frail flying proas, were five loaded outrigger canoes! Coming from the dark, they seemed a larger number, a native navy.

In the prow of the leader stood a short brown figure, leveling a rifle. King Sakita was there to break his own tabu, to stain it before one of his own band set foot on the sands—and thus forfeitcd his life to superstition.

In the reddish light of the lanterns the stained whites of Rudolph Behrens showed up yellow-red. King Sakita's finger curled and tightened on the trigger, as he aimed carefully at the bulging middle of the white man he hated. Crash!

The proa lifted just as the shot came. But it did not fail in deadliness. With lead smashing through both his temples, Rudolph Behrens pitched forward.

His right hand, closing convulsively for a last time, pumped one more bullet from the automatic. This skipped and dusted along the surface of the beach, dying harmlessly.

Then was the patter of many bare feet in the shallows, as the subjects of the rightful native king came to surround those on the tabu island, and menace them with blowguns and parangs.

SOPHISTRY is a perquisite of sovereigns, so it does not matter much just what explanation Sakita gave his men when the question of killing the rest of these invaders who undoubtedly had broken the sacred tabu.

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But there was killing enough, probably, with Behrens and Gunong Api dead, and a prisoner ready for whatever fate Sakita and his counselors decided. And that fate would probably be cruel and terribly gruesome.

The little king strode up to Jimmy Carlin, and touched the back of his hand to his own forehead. Then he did the same thing white-man fashion, extending his tiny palm for a grasp of comradeship which Jimmy was delighted and relieved to return. Jimmy was happy he had reinstated himself with the king. Yes, very happy, indeed.

"The tabu is stained and gone. The blood of an outlander has been shed," said Sakita without visible sorrow. "The agreement cannot be carried out, unless another cares to take up the burden. Someone in whom I can place full confidence and trust. Someone whose word is as good as his bond."

He waited, smiling a little, almost anticipating Jimmie's reply.

"You m-mean—that I might—but I have not—" began Jimmy, stuttering a little when the thrill of Sakita's meaning came to him.

"There is the boat and the stores," said Sakita with a wave of his hand. "I think that there may be a tabu soon—on Tubu-Muna!" he added in his kingly fashion.

"My island!" cried Jimmy, bewildered, hardly able to comprehend the words he was hearing.

"You mistake," said Sakita softly, a faint smile on the corners of his mouth. "*This* is your island! It may be that by the time you return, there will be a house built for you. And then in after years, when the pearl lagoon has yielded its treasures, there may be coconut palms bearing copra for your presses..."

Jimmy's heart did a handstand of exuberance. Perhaps the matter of his debt to Behrens's heirs might not be adjusted quite as simply as the brown man suggested. Still, *something* could be done, of a certainty! And of course, as a man of honor, he would see that some proper adjustment *would be* made to the heirs. There would be no reason for his not doing the fair thing.

"You're a brick, Sakita!" he cried. "Shake again!"

And the little brown king smiled as he complied.

THE END

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Rainbow Morning

By JAMES STEVENS

Hunted for a crime he did not commit—this cowpoke vindicated himself by his only resource—a lasso

WES HARNEY was musing dismally about the rainbow that made a grand and shining arch from the timbered slopes of Gawley Mountain to the breaking cloud-drifts, when the two bandits entered the bank. Naturally Harney did not know at the time that the two were bandits, though he was expecting a cloudburst of trouble to storm upon him soon. It was a rainbow morning, and in Wes Harney's experience that meant bad luck brooding. He wasn't so superstitious, he simply summed up the facts. Wes could name seven separate times when rainbows in the morning had been followed by dismal trouble. He'd tell anybody they were plumb poison to him.

For an hour and more, Wes had been moseying up and down the two business blocks of Salal's main street. He was killing time until the departure of the logging train for the Gawley Mountain camps. They had just opened for spring operation, and Wes had come to Salal with fair hope of a job. But now the bad-luck rainbow was shining up.

Wes mused at it from a sidewalk spot just below the little bank building. A vacant lot gaped between the bank and a store, providing an unobstructed view of the mountainy horizon. Now and again he noted that he was the object of curious glances from the Salal folks who passed along. Salal was a Western Oregon logging town. Wes Harney was from east of the mountains. By nature and breeding he was a cowpoke. Fortune had switched him to the big timber, but he was still

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wearing a sheepskin coat and a ten-gallon hat. Thus Wes was a conspicuous and somewhat curious figure among the mackinawed woodsmen of Salal. And thus Wes Harney was the one emphatically remembered participant in the hold-up of the Salal bank.

The robbery broke when a large, high-powered sedan was stopped in the gravel street before the bank. From it two men in slouch hats and dark overcoats emerged, one from the front and the other from the rear door. The doors were carefully pushed shut, so that the latches were left uncaught. The motor was left running.

So much Wes dimly noted with a sort of glancing attention. Big cars were in no way unusual in the mountains, and this one had the customary look of hard usage. It was likewise common for a driver to leave his motor running while he transacted small business. Wes was unalarmed, yet he felt a stir of wonder at the care with which the car doors had been closed. He drifted idly toward the bank.

The time was a few minutes past ten, the bank's opening hour. The bandits had chosen this time because the vault was sure to be open for the transfer of cash to the window tills. The robbery was a swift, two-man cleanup. One, pulling a sawed-off shotgun from under his overcoat, covered the five early customers, the one teller, and the chief of the bank. The other cornered the cashier in the vault, and held him with the threat of an automatic while scooping currency into a black bag. The loot secured, the bandits back for the doors.

At this precise moment Wes Harney eased one of the doors inward and took in the scene. He was unheard, for the crackling roar of an automatic exploded in the small room. The cashier had taken a chance and jumped for an alarm button. A slug of lead struck him in the middle and he collapsed in a huddle on the vault floor.

The gunman paused to snarl threats. The door closed. Wes Harney was backing for the sidewalk like a roped broncho. Just one thought was blazing in his head. How to put up the bars against a getaway? It took furious figuring. Wes was unarmed. The gunman had shown he would shoot it out with anybody who stood in his way—

For maybe a three-count Wes Harney stood on the sidewalk, thinking fast. Then the purr of the idling motor struck his ears. The sound spurred him into sudden action. He whirled on his heels and lunged for the front door of the big sedan. In the whirl Wes glimpsed the morning rainbow, but it meant nothing to him now. Bad luck was forgotten.

Wes lunged for the door, swiped it open, and dove for the wheel. The emergency lever was already down. Wes drove in the clutch pedal, yanked the gear shift, and booted the accelerator to the floor board. The car bucked violently backward. He had yanked the shift lever into the wrong corner. Seconds were lost in retrieving the error. They were time enough for the bandits.

As the car finally plunged ahead, the tires throwing gravel, Wes heard ominous sounds above the roar of the motor. He glanced over his shoulder. One bandit was twisting up from a sprawl on the rear seat, with his left hand gripping the handle of a black bag, his right still holding the automatic. The door was wide open. The second bandit was clawing at it, pulling himself on from the rear fender.

Wes instinctively shifted his right foot from the accelerator to the brake. In the instant his back hair lifted from

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the touch of hard, cold steel. Words rasped into his ears:

"Keep goin', fella, or you die sudden."

Wes kept going. There was nothing else to do. Under snarled orders, he shifted into high and stepped hard on the gas. The street-end loomed. The gravel road swept in a long curve to the left. The big car took the curve with a lurching skid, and then shot down a straight stretch between the banks of a cut. The gun muzzle had hardly quivered from Wes's neck. It froze down the impulse that had blazed in him back yonder at the bank. He saw clearly his desperate situation.

HE was a stranger in Salal, as much of a stranger as the two bandits. Now the law would peg him as one of them. Last night Wes had suffered one brush with the law in Salal, in the person of a deputy sheriff. He had, he realized, gotten himself into a hopeless jam. And now Wes Harney remembered the rainbow. Rainbow morning! A sure and certain sign of a smashup in the fortunes of Wes Harney. And this one seemed to be a finisher.

Bleak desperation gripped him, drove him into a temper of utter recklessness. The big car swooped to the foot of the hill, soared on up a pitch that ended in the logging-railroad crossing. The grade narrowed sharply, its shoulders sloping to the steep sides of a fill. Wes eased the car toward the right shoulder. Suddenly he jerked the wheel, and at the same time he threw himself face down on the seat.

The automatic roared as he dropped, but it was a wild shot. The gunman had been caught by the quick shift. The shot was echoed by the crash of the car into the bank of the railroad grade. For a terrific second Wes Harney had a queer sense of being in the center of a dynamite explosion. Then, an equally terrific quiet.

He was, it seemed, miraculously unhurt. The smash had jammed him under the dash and entangled his legs with the shift and emergency levers. Pulling himself up cautiously, Wes peered into the back of the sedan. The bandit with the automatic was writhing and groaning on the floor, his face a red smear of blood. The other's head was caught between a door and the sedan body. Evidently he had tried to jump as the car struck on its side. Certainly he was dead.

Wes twisted around to the upper front door. The crash had buckled it loose. Wes scrambled out and up to the road. Then he realized that his left leg was injured. As he stooped to feel it down, a bullet spattered the gravel ten feet ahead of him. He straightened like an unloosed steel spring. An open car, its top back, was swooping down the hill. A man stood by the driver. He pumped lead over the windshield with a rifle. Wes dropped, and rolled down to the shelter of the car.

It was escape or eat lead. That rifleman plainly had no intention of taking any bank-robber alive. At the best, a capture might mean a lynching —never a chance—nobody would believe his story—

Harney's desperate gaze was caught by a culvert at the foot of the slope. It appeared large enough for a man to crawl through, and it led under the railroad fill. Wes crawled for it on hands and knees. In a minute he had pawed through a mucky blackness and was in daylight again. Peering up through marshy weeds and willows, Wes saw that he had crawled under both the mainline and a sidetrack. On

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the latter stood a string of empty log trucks. This was the made-up train for the woods, due to start in half an hour.

On toward the river loomed the mills, yards and offices of the Gawley Timber Company. Wes crawled on through the marshy thickets, toward the upper end of the string of cars. It was headed by three camp-supply cars —and then Wes saw the speeder.

Some track boss had come down from the woods on his gasoline car. Wes scrambled for that hope in a limping run. The motor was hot. The ignition key was in its slot. This was usual in the woods, where anybody might suddenly need the car. Luck had given Wes Harney this break. In a ten-count he was off for a desperate getaway.

He had to stop for the main-line switch. From there he glimpsed the wreck, through a hedge of second-growth timber. The two man-hunters were at the culvert mouth. They seemed to be in violent argument. Wes had a fair start. The speeder chugged on around a bend, up the steep grade to the mountain.

An hour later he ditched the speeder after crossing a canyon trestle. He had spotted a camp of some kind ahead. A telephone wire followed the tracks. There was a solid chance that man-hunters would be out up here in the woods.

Wes took a double-bitted ax from the speeder's tool rack. He headed up the wild canyon. A mile of fierce climbing over windfalls and thick undergrowth, and the pain in his hurt leg became intolerable. Wes took shelter behind a huge mossy windfall. Grimly he waited, sure that he would be tracked down, that at last bad luck had followed him to a finish.

The sky above was clearing. Spring sunlight poured in golden floods through widening gaps in the clouds. The morning rainbow had vanished; its work was done.

WES HARNEY was allowed only a short breathing spell. Crouching under the bulk of the huge windfall log, he was unlacing the ten-inch boot-top from his swollen ankle, when he heard the bush shattering down the canyon. Gripping the ax, Wes waited for the end. He was so low in hope and spirit now that he could only see himself trailed out right here and soon. But he would fight, he vowed, to the last lick. That was the only style for a man from the John Day county.

Squinting one eye along the log, Wes saw the bush break. A brindle cow loped into the spot of clearing, with a spindling bald-faced calf squeezing her ribs. Expecting smoky hell to storm over him, Wes was somewhat petrified by the sight. Then things happened.

Opposite the windfall the calf fell. The cow hauled up and whirled about, frantically nuzzling the calf. It wabbled up and staggered on, but fell again at the base of a shoulder of rock some fifty feet from the log. Then the bush broke again. A pair of gaunt, slavering, hungry-eyed timber wolves snarled into the clearing. They separated, one charging the cow, trying to draw her up the canyon from the rock shoulder, while the other cut in for the calf.

The cow was a milker, with none of the cunning and experience of a range critter. She let herself be baited too far from the calf. Wes found himself rising up behind the log. He choked back a yell, which might have brought a pack of man-hunters up the canyon after him. For an instant he braced

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himself and swung the ax behind him. Then, with a whiplash sweep of arm from the shoulder, he threw the double-edged blade. The bits made a whirling glitter in the sunshine, then struck with a bone-breaking thud. The wolf was caught in the middle of a leap. He rolled for a dozen feet, and was still.

The second wolf plunged for the bush, in frenzied flight. Her brindled sides heaving convulsively, the cow turned back to her calf.

Up the steep canyon slope a bush swished and crackled. A loosened rock rolled, and thudded into a tree trunk or a log. With a huge sigh of resignation, Wes Harney swung up to a perch on the windfall. He forked a twisted grin at the brindle and her bald-face.

"No use, no ma'am," sighed Wes. "Me, when I meet up with a rainbow and a cow in the same mornin', I'm a goner beyond help. Men, you can fire when ready."

With that, he began to twirl up a brown-paper cigarette. He kept his back squarely on the approaching footfalls. There was some method in the pose. Wes figured that even bandit-hunters would pause before plugging a man in the back. The notion seemed good. The footsteps came to a close halt. There was no shooting. Then:

"Good herding, cowboy. I sure am plenty obliged."

It was a girl's voice. A soft twang sounded in its tone, the drawl of the Eastern Oregon range country. Wes slowly swung around on the windfall, hooking his bad leg over a snag of a limb. Without realizing it, he had naturally taken the position of a rider at ease in the saddle. He stared hungrily at this girl who talked like home.

She flushed under the steady, burning gaze of the gray eyes below the brim of the big hat. She said: "I'm Letty Makin, from the pulp-wood camp yonder over the ridge. I've been out hunting Scatter and Bunch all morning. First sign I had of 'em was when I glimpsed the shine of your ax as you flung it. I reckon, mister, you saved Bunch from a timber-wolf breakfast."

"It was no trick, ma'am," said Wes slowly. "No trick a-tall." Then he remembered his manners. He pulled off his hat, unloosing a tangled mane of black hair that contrasted vividly with his gray eyes. "Pleased to meet you, ma'am," he drawled. "I'm Wesley Harney, from the John Day. You sound like folks your own self."

"Dad and me are from the Grande Ronde."

Both were silent. Wes remembered things. He lit the cigarette and wondered just how he'd explain said things to this girl from home. She wouldn't believe him. She couldn't. Nobody could.

Letty Makin was frankly studying him. Wes returned the compliment with a sidewise gaze through blue curls of cigarette smoke. Despite her clothes—a battered Scotch cap, an equally worn green-and-black checked mackinaw which was so oversized it fairly swallowed her, army breeches and heavy laced boots—Letty Makin was a festive figure for any male eye. In the huge mackinaw her young slenderness was like the silver lining of an ugly cloud. A curling fringe of fine blond hair escaped from the coarse cap. Blue eyes smiled.

"You look Spanish," said Letty. "You don't mind my saying so?"

"Nope. Proud of the look. Plenty of us yonder east, and it's sound stock—"

Wes remembered again. His tone

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suddenly and resolutely harshened. "Looky here, ma'am," he said. "I don't like to say flat out your company ain't wanted, but the dismal fact is this here canyon is plumb unhealthy right now. I'm wanted, bad, by the law."

The girl's blue eyes shone with unbelief, then caught the truth in Harney's expression. Her gaze roved quickly around. The canyon wall rose sheerly behind the windfall. Beyond the opposite ridge were woods camps. Down the canyon was Salal. Above were the mountains and snow peaks of the Cascade range. And now Letty noticed the unlaced boot, the ankle swelling through the gap.

"You're pretty much corraled then, mister," she said gravely. "I believe what you say, but I don't believe you're a bad hombre. I don't figure to quit you till I hear your piece. What happened?"

The temptation was too strong for Wes, and he yielded. It had been months, years, seemed like, since he had talked to anybody sympathetic. As briefly as he could, he narrated the events of the rainbow morning.

LETTY MAKIN listened with grave attention, leaning against the mossy log, her eyes now keenly searching Harney's face, then gazing reflectively across the canyon and up the ridge.

From the clearing skies the warm and mellow sunlight poured down, sifting through the rain-washed boughs of the scrub pines. Birds chirped and squirrels chattered from the trees. Earthy spring smells wafted from the budding bush. In such a scene Letty Makin could not think evil of anybody.

"Just what happened," Wes concluded. "But who'd believe it?"

"I do," said the girl quietly. "And I'm going to give you a chance to prove up. First thing"—her tone sharpened—"you shuck that sheepskin and range hat. I'm swapping you dad's old mackinaw and cap, and no argument."

There was some argument, but Wes soon gave in. He was young enough for hope to spark in him at the least sign of a shift of luck. Seeing this girl, a slender sprig of a girl in a gray flannel shirt as she shed the oversized mackinaw, her blue eyes sparkling with excitement, made Wes wonder if maybe this rainbow morning hadn't been a golden sign, after all.

"If that one bandit is still alive, he'll surely clear you," Letty said. "In the meantime, mister, you do just what I tell you, and you'll be safe from the law. If you can only manage to hobble to our camp—"

Letty Makin unfolded a plan. Wes agreed to it. He saw no other hope. And the plan might work. Anyhow it was a try, not just waiting in a trap.

Letty cached his sheepskin and hat in the hollow end of the log, while Wes, in the mackinaw and cap, treated his bad leg in the cold water of the canyon creek. There the girl left him, and headed on up the ridge. After a time Wes labored his boot back on, left it unlaced, picked up a stick to serve as a cane, then started the completely subdued Scatter and Bunch down the canyon.

AT the logging railroad trestle the brindle and the baldface turned up the trail that led to the tracks and on to the Makin camp. Wes, hunched with pain, hobbled and dragged behind them. At the top of the trail the cow stopped, shied to the left, then started on up the tracks in a trot. Wes felt a sudden thumping

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under his left ribs and his breath seemed to choke in his throat. But he made himself limp on, shoulders hunched in the mackinaw, head down, the peak of the cap well over his eyes. A rasping voice hailed him.

"Hey there, logger! You haul up!"

Wes obeyed, turning deliberately toward the voice, his eyes staring dully from a dirt-streaked face. He stood fast, gaping.

Two men armed with rifles stood at the end of the trestle, where Wes had ditched the speeder. The one who had called out was the deputy sheriff of last night's encounter. That had transpired in the railroad yards as Wes debarked from a box-car. The rainy darkness was too thick at the time for either man to see much of the other. But Wes well remembered the rasping voice, which had informed him bluntly that if he was caught in Salal after the next morning's train left for the woods, he would be jugged. The speaker had declared himself as Cully Hatch, the one arm of the law in Salal.

Wes surmised that Mr. Hatch was the party who had shot at him over the windshield of the open car. His partner was a lean, sallow, mournful-eyed man with a drooping mustache. Mr. Hatch was distinctly in command. He had the build and the belligerent manner of a bull. He swung over the rails and hauled up before Wes, with square chin jutting and smoky eyes glowering.

"Can't you talk, huh? Can you answer a civil question, hey?" boomed Mr. Hatch. "Who th'ell are you? What th'alleluiah you doin' here? Hey?"

Wes blinked dull eyes under the peak of the cap. He shrugged his hunched shoulders. He spoke in a thick voice.

"Me Mike Hrbacek," he said. "Me bullcook Makin camp. No talk good motch, nossir."

"What's that? What's the name?" Mr. Hatch looked bewildered.

"Me Mike Hrbacek," said Wes stolidly.

"Oh—uh—Erbycheck—hell of a handle," growled the deputy. "Bohunk, hey?"

"No Bohunk," said Wes placidly. "Me Hunyok."

Hatch scowled heavily. He seemed reassured, but still a mite suspicious. "I didn't know Ed Makin had a bullcook," he said. "When was you hired?"

"No spik motch." Wes looked puzzled. "Donno you say motch."

"You're just wastin' time on him, Cully," protested the mournful-eyed man, in a shrill, cranky voice. "Ast him whut he was doin' up the canyon and if he seen thet sagebrusher."

"I was just goin' to." And Hatch repeated the questions.

"Donno." Wes looked more puzzled still. "No savvy motch. Me hunt cow." He waved a hand after Scatter and Bunch. "Make leg sick." He jutted a thumb at his twisted ankle. "Better me go now, honh?"

"Let him go," whined Mournful Eyes. "We'd better hustle and prowl the canyon. You've mussed things enough already, Cully."

The deputy wheeled around with an angry snort. "Who's mussed things?" he roared. "It was you much as me let that bandit crawl outer the wreck and git away. It was you who talked me into grabbin' the log train up here—"

"Aw, shet up." Wes was startled and perturbed as he saw Mournful Eyes wink warningly at Hatch. The deputy was suddenly silent. "Git along, hunk," barked Mournful Eyes at Wes. "Ramble outer yere."

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Wes hobbled on, holding his pose. But he had a dismal hunch that he had muffed his play. He hobbled slowly, held his breath, listening. Stray words muttered to him—

"Did'n' sound—Bohunk—me, Cully. Injun—"

Hatch's deep growl was plainer. "But he said he was a Hunyok."

"What's—diff'? And—thumb nail—rope burn—"

"Well, that leg is no fake. We'll prowl to camp later and make sure. Now let's comb the canyon."

In Wes the spark flickered low as he hobbled on after Scatter and Bunch. He had, he now realized, talked more like an Indian than a Hunky in the attempt to play Mike Hrbacek, bullcook. And that spike of a thumb-nail—a rope-brand to a wise eye—

But he forced the spark to flicker into life some more. A girl from home had made herself his lookout in the game with the law and his luck. Wes vowed he would deal on to his last white chip.

THE noon-hour was over when Wes Harney finally dragged into the Makin camp. Scatter and Bunch had preceded him by several minutes. Letty had already picketed the prodigal cow on a grassy slope above a row of tar-paper shacks. In front of the largest shack she waited for Wes, beckoning for him to enter. He limped along, and into a combination office and living quarters. Behind a plank counter stood a battered rolltop desk, a blanketed bunk, a box stove, and sundry chairs. A curtained doorway led to a back room.

"I reckon you're hungry, mister," said Letty. She was lifting a roll of bandage and a bottle of liniment from a first-aid box. "You set here by the stove and fix your ankle while I rustle a plate of grub. And you can use these, cowboy." She stooped at the end of the bunk and hauled forth a pair of heavy wool socks and a pair of rubber shoes for use with felt boots. "These are dad's, and should fit you up. Make yourself to home—and save the thanks—Scatter and Bunch owe you plenty—"

Words trailed away with Letty into the back room. She hadn't given Wes a chance to say anything. He sagged down gratefully into a home-made padded chair by the stove. For a moment he rested, twirling up a cigarette. He blinked wearily through the smoke. A sunlit window shone before him, giving him a view of the timber up the railroad.

He had glimpses of the wood-cutters. Two horse-teams were skidding hemlock logs down to a sidetrack. There a dragsaw was chugging, and a pair of men were splitting the blocks with wedges and mauls. An empty flatcar flanked them from the sidetrack. A similar car had been dropped close to the camp. It bulked with stuff covered by tarpaulins. Feed, Wes surmised, baled hay for the horses. Probably the two cars had been switched and dropped from this morning's logging train.

Relaxing and thinking hazily, Wes seemed to catch a movement of a tarpaulin. He stared hard for a moment, then, as he saw nothing more, he decided that a flaw in the window-pane or the smoke in his eyes had deceived him.

The incident vanished from his mind with her appearance—blue eyes smiling through a drift of steam from a loaded tray.

"It's my cooking," she said, setting the tray down on a chair by his side.

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"Regular ranch grub, so maybe you can stand it."

Wes could only look his thanks. A rush of feeling was sort of like a rope on his throat. It burned to his eyes, and he had to stoop low over the steaming plate to hide it from Letty Makin. He was wolf-hungry, but the first swallows came hard. Months and months in a strange land, an alien from the sagebrush country in the big timber, and here he was home again. It was something to melt up a tougher man than Wes Harney.

The girl from home talked along, seeming to understand, not expecting him to chip in. She had told dad, she said, and dad had given her a free hand. Ed Makin, Wes gathered, had himself been having a hard time of it over here in the woods. It appeared that he was running behind in his pulpwood contract and was in some jam with the Salal bank. Anyhow, he was about ready to quit and pull up stakes.

"Over home we've got two hundred acres in winter wheat," said Letty. "If we lose everything here, we'll still have that. I'm afraid dad is wishing the bank would close us out, sudden. It's spring on the Grande Ronde." Her voice was wistful, her eyes looking far away. "The wheat is sprouting green."

"Grass peepin' up in the sage," said Wes softly, leaning back and lazily rolling a fresh cigarette. "The baldfaces turned out of the feedyards and grazin' up the draws. Cowpokes ridin'. Hosses still winter-wild, snortin' and pitchin' when a jack sails high. Sunrise time, and the night-frost steamin' from the sage—say, can't you just smell it, ma'am?"

"Can't I just?" sighed Letty Makin.

It seemed to Wes that they had known each other a lifetime. They dreamed on in their talk until a twist of his bandaged ankle reminded him that home was far away. He lapsed into gloomy silence.

"Thinking of rainbows?" said Letty. "Rainbow mornings?"

"Kind of," he muttered.

"You kept ringing rainbows into your story back yonder in the canyon. I've been wondering what you meant."

"I'll tell you, ma'am," said Wes grimly. "Mean misfortune, you betcher. This here wasn't the first time. Why, it was a rainbow mornin' chased me out of the John Day. Right on the tail of the purtiest rainbow you ever laid eyes on come a cloudburst. Washed out shack, sheds, corral, feedyard and four stacks of winter hay from my canyon ranch slick as a willer whistle.

"I already owed the limit on my little bunch of beef. So I had to trail out broke, and—well, here I am. And that was only one rainbow mornin'."

"And this is another, cowboy. Things like that just happen. They don't mean anything unless you let 'em rope you in."

Wes didn't argue the point. His brooding gaze had wandered to the window again. And again he was startled by a stir of the tarpaulins on the flatcar. He still didn't trust his eyes, so he said nothing. Besides, Letty Makin was giving him explicit directions about playing the part of Mike Hrbacek, Hunyok bullcook.

WES had little trouble playing the part until twilight clouded down on the woods. Then, with supper over and the camp settling for the night, Deputy Cully Hatch and Mournful Eyes dragged in. They bore with them a sheepskin coat, a ten-gal-

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lon hat, and a load of suspicion. Wes had a hunch that they had been keeping cases on the Makin camp all afternoon.

If so, they had certainly seen nothing from him that violated the character of Mike Hrbacek. With a pair of blankets, he had made himself a bunk in the feed shed of the stable. There he rested his sorely tried leg. Now and again he dozed off, but it was always to awaken in a nightmare riot of threatening danger. Some warning thing was sleepless in him. It kept him peering through the open shed door, pulling his gaze toward the flatcar tarpaulins. A breeze had blown up, and in it the canvas flapped and billowed. The notion that something alive could have been lurking under there all this time seemed a foolish notion, but it haunted Wes just the same.

At quitting time Ed Makin looked in on him. Makin was a grizzled, hawk-faced man whose eyes were hedged by weather-graven lines. He asked Wes a few questions, mainly about the location of his ranch in the John Day and about certain cowmen and their brands. The answers apparently satisfied him.

"We'll back you up, I reckon," he said quietly. "Till they cool off down in Salal, anyhow. They'd lynch you now before you could put in a word for yourself. Did you know one of the real bandits outslickered Cully Hatch and made his getaway?"

"No!" Wes sat up, staring. He remembered the bit of argument between Hatch and Mournful Eyes. "I thought they meant—but how'd it happen?"

"Don't know. Just heard it from the Cawley loggers. Well—you keep on bein' a dumb hunk of a bullcook. We'll stick."

Wes forgot his manners. He was wordless as the old rancher drifted out of the shed. Wes was not even seeing Ed Makin now. He was only looking out through the sunset shadows at the flapping tarpaulins. The canvas was a darkening bulge against the black boughs of hemlocks that lifted in a thick spread beyond the tracks. Wes let his hunch rise up and grip him. He would, he vowed, keep close cases on the car yonder until it was mighty deep night.

TWILIGHT clouded swiftly into black darkness, with an overcast sky that promised another spring rain. While the crew was eating, Letty brought a plate of supper to the feed shed.

"I mustn't stay," she said, speaking in a whisper. "Some of the boys are suspicious of you. It's natural for them to be suspicious of anybody, with two supposed killers prowling loose in the woods."

"Am I still Mike Hrbacek?" Wes wanted to know.

"You bet you are, cowboy. I've sure raveled out the truth on your account. I just said you come along, looking half-starved, and you helped me hunt Scatter and Bunch. You saved Bunch, I said, and hurt yourself, so I figured the least I could do was to keep you on for a spell as roustabout bullcook."

"That's not bustin' truth so bad."

"It's wearing it kind of thin, I'm afraid. But I don't care. I won't see these webfooters string up a neighbor. Now I've got to get back. If the boys snoop around, you just be dumb."

"Honh," grunted Wes, with a grin. "I don' spik motch."

Two of the teamsters drifted into the shed after supper. They failed to pump anything out of Wes but grunts and groans. At last, as deep night fell, the camp was quiet. Wes eased from

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the bunk and limped to the shed door. Some forty feet before him the flatcar and its load made a bulging black shadow. The ground sloped gently from the sidetrack, so that a level gaze from Wes struck fairly under the car's floor.

Looking on under the car, Wes could see two parallel gray streaks in the black shadows. They were the well-worn rails of the main line.

For a spell Wes Harney ruminated on the black shape that bulged above the sidetrack and on the gray streaks below and beyond the shape. Then he regarded the row of tar-paper shacks. All but one was darkened. This was the Makin office and living quarters. Two windows were squares of light in the black shadows. Now and again Wes had a fleeting vision of a girl's head and shoulders moving across the light squares. The glimpses of Letty Makin put iron in his resolution. She had trusted him on sight. A girl from home—whatever his luck, Wes Harney was fiercely resolved to clear himself or die a-trying.

If this here hunch wasn't just a fool notion, a straw of a chance was in his grip. But it was only a straw, and in his condition he was in poor shape to make much of it. The leg was pretty bad. Wes had to grip the door post with his left hand to hold his weight from it. Every hobble was a shot of torture.

Wes stood on there, and figured the trail his hunch should follow. He had kept it to himself for two reasons. For one thing, a search under the tarps that revealed nothing but baled hay would have left him looking considerably silly. But the main reason was his certainty that heavy shooting would greet any searcher, if the hunch was good.

Nope. That flatcar and whatever it sheltered were Wes Harney's responsibility. He had taken it on, and he would hold it, even if he had to night-herd the flatcar until daylight.

Whatever happened, about the best he could do would be to let out a yell, Wes mused dismally. And that would likely start shooting. With shooting he was fed up for the day, and some over.

The gray streaks that showed under the flatcar floor again caught his gaze. Another hunch struck Wes Harney. He remembered his best range trick. It might work—anyhow, it was another grip on the straw of a chance. He hobbled back into the shed.

The feed shed also served as a storage place for harness and skid-rigging. A battered saddle was slung from a corner peg, and with it a rawhide rope. Wes groped for that rope now and fetched it down. The feel of the rawhide braids to his hands was something like the flavor of hot meat to a starving man.

As he limped back to the doorway, Wes Harney almost forgot his game leg.

Then things began happening again, in a sort of stampede. Wes was hardly settled into night-herding the flatcar once more, when a large, rumbling voice carried to him from the Makin shack. He stared that way, recognizing the bull tones of Deputy Hatch. The door opened. Lamplight sifted out, around the shadowy figure of Letty Makin. In the glow Hatch and Mournful Eyes stood revealed. Hatch packed a bundle. His rumble boomed along—

"We found this sagebrusher rig when we come back down the canyon, Miss Makin. And we found no other sign of that cowpoke driver of the ban-

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dits' car. We crave to know some more about that there bullcook of your'n."

LETTY was inviting them inside. The door closed on Hatch's angry rumble. Wes Harney moved. The time was done for watchful waiting. He had to play his hunch in sudden action. It was that, or else hole up in the bunk again and try to put on a dumbwitted show, with Hatch bullying him, Letty Makin trying to shield him—nope, he just couldn't hack that some more—hiding behind a woman, a home girl.

He crouched down in the cloudy darkness, and crept for that black shape above the tracks. If it was only a shape there, he thought bleakly, well, he'd just keep heading on. No more hiding around, maybe pulling the Makins into bad trouble with the law—

But it was more than a shape of tarps there, bulging from a pile of baled hay. Wes had lifted noises as he crouched along, his bad leg sort of dragging. He now came to a dead halt, the rawhide coils gripped in his left hand, his right idling the loop, as sounds of hurried movement broke through the shadows from the car. Then, in the click of seconds, sundry events violently happened.

The two gray streaks that showed dully under the car were shadowed by two elongated, vertical shapes. In Wes Harney the shapes were instantly registered as human legs. In the same instant, his hands and arms, his entire body, reacted automatically. An underhanded, whiplash sweep of his right arm, a flipping snap of the right wrist, and the loop of braided rawhide snaked for the shadowy legs. From Wes Harney's left hand the coils ran free. He sensed the strike. An upward yank, then a haulback with both hands, legs braced, the fiery pains that shot through his nerves unheeded—and Wes Harney had roped another slick-ear.

But this one was an outlaw with a gun. The first yanking haul on the rope was followed by a thud and a snarling yell. Then, as Wes hauled hard, hand over hand, the sharp explosion of a gunshot crashed from the shadowy shape that struggled in the loop. Two more blazed and roared, the last fairly in Harney's face as he dragged his captive close. But the jerking rope sent all three shots wild. As the last one flared Wes lunged, throwing slack into the rawhide, looping it into a large half-hitch. The loop dropped to taw, over a head and shoulders. In another second the bandit killer was disarmed and hog-tied.

The spot of a flashlight jiggered around. As it struck a battered, distorted face, Wes exultantly knew that his hunch had proved true. But there was another job to do. His own name had to be cleared of the robbery. Wes spotted the gun. He swooped for it, crouching over his capture.

Wes shifted so that the light streamed over his gun hand and into the bandit's eyes. He had only the thought that Deputy Hatch and Mournful Eyes had horned into the play. They should hear facts.

"You talk turkey," he rasped. "Now. You do, and I'll stand by you against the lynchers. You don't, and I'll make 'em a gift of your neck. Tell the truth of that hold-up, and tell it short."

With a gun in his hand, the bandit was a tough yegg. Without one, and roped down, he was meek and tame. He talked. He told the story Wes wanted Hatch and Mournful Eyes to

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hear. He told more, which should have reddened up their ears.

"Them saps was easy." The shake of fear in the bandit's tone steadied into a boastful note. "When they come on the wreck they went huntin' eggs or sompin in the bush. I come to and scrambles after that wild farmer for the culvert. But they was huntin' that way. So I snakes up on the main line and crosses to the head of the log train. I hides out in the car of baled hay. The clowns thinks I gets away wit' the farmer on the speeder, and damn' if they don't ride the same train wit' me to the woods, and never tumbles! Jeez!"

Wes straightened triumphantly to face Mr. Hatch and Mournful Eyes. Instead, the joyful gaze of Letty Makin shone above the flash. Mr. Hatch was keeping distant and quiet until he was sure the shooting was over.

"Oh, Wes!" Her voice was a shaky whisper. "Oh, cowboy—"

Then, for a moment they could only sort of stare at each other. Things were whirling crazily in Wes Harney's head. In the center of the whirl was a sense of being his own man again, the Wes Harney who had stood up to anybody before bad luck bulldogged him for a fall. At last that luck was licked.

"Rainbows," said Wes Harney softly to the girl from home. "Rainbows on the range will shine for us soon. A rainbow mornin' made us meet up. From now on me and rainbows are fine friends."

"Jeez!" They were startled by a groan from the hog-tied bandit. "What a finish! I been pinched by a nut! Rainbows—jeez!"

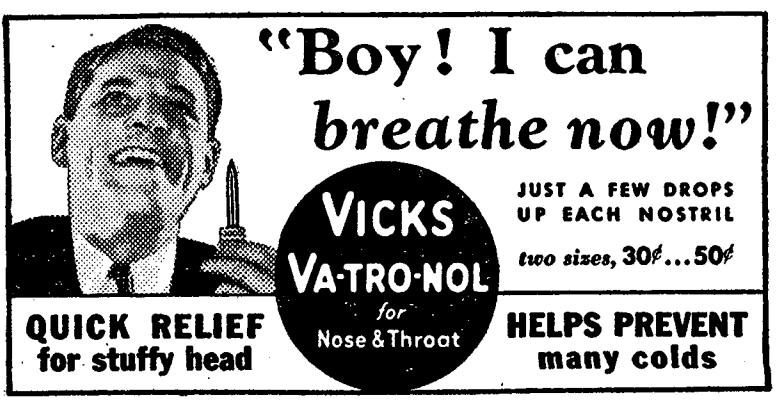
THE END

Yellow Clothes Defy Mosquitoes

YELLOW clothes may soon be prescribed for holidays in the tropics. It has just been discovered that mosquitoes are not color blind and simply detest yellow.

Professor Nuttall of Cambridge declares that the reactions of different species vary, but as far as evidence goes, yellow does the trick in the majority of cases.

Joseph Creamer.



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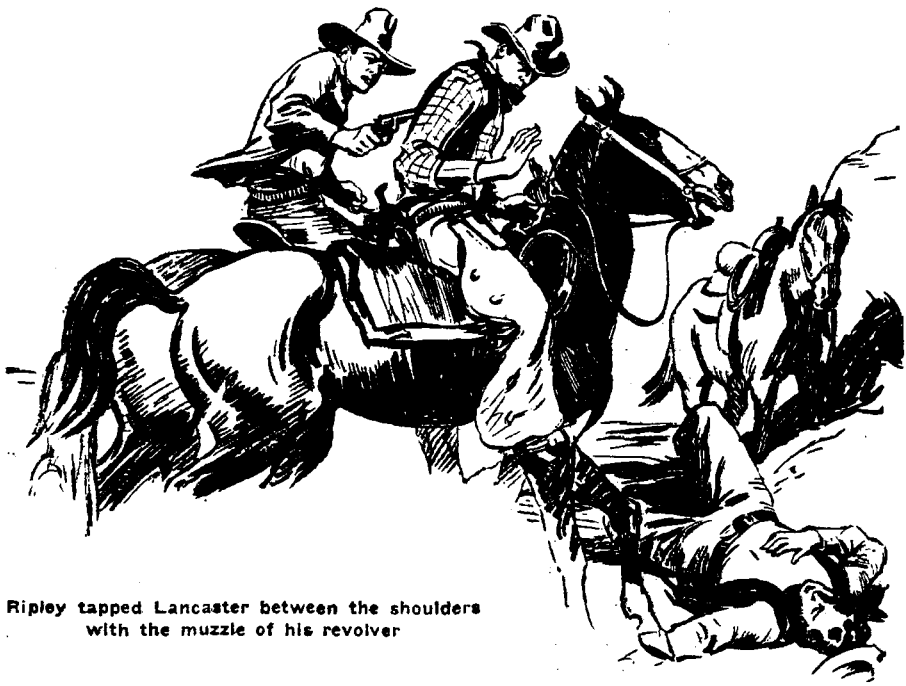

Ripley tapped Lancaster between the shoulders with the muzzle of his revolver

Scourge of the Rio Grande

By MAX BRAND

A fifty thousand dollar bribe couldn't budge Jack Ripley from his duty—yet when the pretty, mysterious Ching summoned him—

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JACK RIPLEY, one of the most notorious of the bad hombres of the Southwest Border, is taken into custody by Marshal Tom Dallas, who makes an offer to Jack by which he can forego a long prison sentence for his past offenses. He is told he can wipe the slate clean by capturing the head of a smuggling ring bringing Chinese across the Border. Tom Dallas is able to give Jack little information about Jim Lancaster, the ringleader; but he sets out to find Lancaster.

By good fortune, Jack meets Chuck Warren, an old friend, who conducts him to the house of Sam Li, a silk and tea merchant. There he meets the pretty, shy girl, Ching. Jack learns that Sam Li's establishment is the base of smuggling operations and Jack is introduced to Lancaster. The ringleader is impressed with Jack's reputation as a tough but square-shooter, and wants to employ him as a guide to bring safely across the Sierra Blanca Mountains a shipment of Chinese boys, and to conduct safely with the party a scar-faced Chink named Dong, who is held in great regard and affection by Ching. Jack agrees to Lancaster's proposition in order to get a close view of the smugglers' operations.

Ripley meets the packet of Chinamen, headed by Lancaster's lieutenant, Dan Tolliver, and camps with them for the night. Dong, the scar-face, is led away by Tolliver from the camp to be shot on "orders from some one higher than Lan-

This story began in the Argosy for October 20.

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caster." Jack rescues Dong from Tolliver and they ride away and manage to get through safely to Sam Li's. But after arriving there, to the chagrin of Lancaster and the sorrow of Ching, Dong mysteriously vanishes.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOUBLE-CROSSED?

LANCASTER was striding up and down, stopped now and again abruptly by his thoughts.

Ripley said, "How about a little information, Jim? You're on the inside. Let me know what it all means—what hitched the scar-face to the girl?"

"Who told you I was on the inside?" demanded Lancaster. "The inside be damned—and I'm damned, too—and so are you. And the whole game is a fool's game, and I'm the biggest fool."

Sam Li came back into the room, the floor muttering a little under the gigantic weight of his step.

"Come here!" commanded Lancaster.

Sam Li went to him. "I am unhappy for you, my friend," he said.

"Leave it off, will you?" shouted Lancaster. Rage choked his voice off thin. "Have to keep on the damn gibberish even with me? Tell me the straight of this. What happened? What did your flatfaced Chinaman do with the girl's man? You know, and you'll tell me, by God!"

Missouri Slim moved from his corner with a long and noiseless step that carried him sidelong until he was behind Sam Li. There he paused. A smile kept flashing on his face, crookedly twisting it, going out, appearing on the other side again.

But Sam Li was apparently unconscious of danger. He merely said: "At a time like this, when there is grief and trouble between friends, silence is best. Let us be silent until we have thought about a new thing to do."

Lancaster said through his grinding teeth: "I've got the idea now. It's a flat double-cross. You've got Ching, and that means you've got me. If the scar-face comes to Ching and talks five minutes to her, she's through with you. She's finished with you. And that means as soon as she goes that *I'll* be finished with you, too. So what do you do? When the scar-face comes here, you put him out of the way. You wipe him out—and then the game is to start all over again—the scar-face on the loose somewhere — and Lancaster working like a dog on his trail—and the girl still here—damn your rotten heart, I see the game clear through! And I'll—"

Ripley slid his hand inside his coat to the butt of his gun. He saw Missouri lean a little forward to have perfect balance for the shot he was to fire into Sam Li.

The Chinaman said, in his soft, deep voice which filled his words with a sort of super meaning: "When I was a young man such talk would have made me very angry. Now I am not angry. I am too old."

"D'you know where you stand? D'you know where you are?" snarled Lancaster, chewing up his words.

"When I was young," said Sam Li, "I went to war. There is one grief to me now—that I must die with a bullet through my back."

The thing struck Ripley heavily. It struck Lancaster also, and made him jerk up his head. And suddenly Ripley felt that he was under control again, just as a bolting horse is under control when its head comes up.

"I'm being a fool," said Lancaster.

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"If I believe in you now, I'm the biggest fool in the world. God, if you're crooking me, Sam Li—if you're crooking me—"

Sam Li said nothing, and his silence was a greater burden than the rage of Lancaster could support. It diminished suddenly. And he said: "Ripley, I'll be seeing you. Stay here, if you want—or up there in the house of the greaser. There's plenty more to do. Wait a minute—I've lost my head a little and started yelling around. But I'm not forgetting what you've done. You caught the fish. Somebody else chucked it back in the water."

He turned on his heel and went through the door. Missouri Slim followed him, his eyes always on Ripley so that he sidled through the doorway in order to keep his glance on the enemy to the last instant.

There was left Sam Li, vast, still, impassive. "It is our friends who empty our hearts," he said gently, after a moment, "because only they possess the key."

He turned more directly to Ripley. "Will you come to see Ching?" he asked. "Because now she hungers for good words as the summer earth hungers for the rain."

"Yes," said Ripley. "There's nothing that I'd rather do than see her, if she's not ill."

"Her heart is empty; if it is filled a little she will be well again," said Sam Li. He led the way out of the room with his slow, monstrous strides. And he continued as they went up a stairway: "Who can have much happiness? All that we ask is enough to fill the hand, enough to play with. Though her poor man is gone, give her a few thoughts of him and he will begin to live again in her mind. Hope will not die easily. It may be struck through the heart, but still it has wings that will keep on flying."

HE came to a door which he pressed open and drew Ripley with him into a fragrant little room. The hanging light showed on the window-sill a blue bowl filled with sunny yellow flowers, and a screen on which birds of green and scarlet and blue flew through marvelous foliage.

The girl lay flat on a bed whose cover spilled towards the floor; she had a pillow hugged against her face.

"Ching," said Sam Li, "I have brought you the man who can give you comfort. He will tell you about the man we have lost. But if we have lost him, we shall find him again."

"No," mourned the girl, "he is lost—he is lost—I shall never see him again!"

"Think," said Sam Li, "that a thing worth stealing is worth keeping. And so they will keep him."

"Do you believe so?" cried Ching, lifting herself suddenly, sitting on the edge of the bed.

Sam Li drew out a silken handkerchief and dried her face. Ripley watched the closing and the opening of her eyes as she submitted to that care. He could have done better than Sam Li, he felt.

"This is our friend," sad Sam Li. "This is *your* friend, Ching. Must he remain standing?"

She got up and offered a place to Ripley on a couch that was a mere pile of cushions against the corner of the wall. But he remained standing.

"I just wanted to tell you about him, what a good fellow he is," said Ripley.

"He is so good that no one is like him," said Ching. "Did you notice that?"

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"Yes," said Ripley.

"And his poor, dreadful face!"

"Yes," said Ripley.

"Could you see the kindness in it, after all?"

"I did see it."

Sam Li drew back to the corner. He stood there immobile. "This is much better," he said. "When words begin, peace will follow. Tell Ching how you found him, and how you were hunted!"

"Hunted?" said the girl.

"I'll tell you this," said Ripley. He wanted to come closer to her. He felt that if he were nearer she could see his thoughts more clearly. "When we were pretty hard pressed and they were closing on us, the horse I was riding got pretty tired. And he wanted to give me his horse. He wanted to throw himself away. He would have dropped out of his saddle to let me take his place. I had to grab him by the back of the neck."

"Did he do that?" repeated the girl. "Did poor old Dong do that? Did he want to give you his horse?"

"What horse was it?" asked Sam Li.

"It was fresher than mine," said Ripley, hastily.

"But how could he ever sit in a saddle at all?" asked Ching.

"He let the reins go and held onto the pommel."

"With both hands?"

"Yes."

She began to laugh. He wanted the sound to go on and on. It was filling that empty chamber in his mind.

"We tried to talk," said Ripley, when the laughter fell away, "but there was only one word that we could both understand."

"He could say two or three words of English in the old days," said the girl.

"The only one we could both understand was Ching."

"Do you hear?" said Sam Li. "People who love the same thing must love one another."

"Hush, Sam Li," said the girl, and lifted a hand.

"Why are you so ashamed?" asked Sam Li. "Why else do you think he went for Dong?"

"He was sent," said the girl. "Jim Lancaster sent him for Dong."

"Was that why he was ready to die for Dong?" asked Sam Li.

"Hush, hush!" pleaded the girl, and she added: "I'm sorry. Chinese people have different ways. Forgive Sam Li, but tell me how Dong could have vanished out of this house. They will kill him! And poor Dong—he will smile while they *murder* him!"

NOW, for an instant of pity, Ripley almost forgot her, remembering the battered smile of Dong as he faced the gun. He said: "They'll not kill him. Remember what Sam Li says. A thing that's worth stealing is worth keeping. And there's something else—that I'll follow him till I find him for you."

"For you," said the booming, gong-like voice of Sam Li. "Do you hear, Ching? For *you* he will find him."

She made to Ripley a gesture of infinite gratitude; and because of the big, blundering speech of Sam Li, into the smooth of her forehead came wrinkles of pain above the smile. But Sam Li came closer, so that as the girl rose he stretched out his enormous arms and half surrounded them both.

"If there were only one day or one year for our lives, how much happier every moment would be!" said the Chinaman. "Hold out your hand, my good friend."

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Ripley held out his hand.

"Look into his hand," said Sam Li. "Now, looking closely, do you see, the life he has offered for you? When they rode after him and their yelling came in his ears, it was for you that he kept Dong in the saddle. That was the life—see it in his hand—that he was offering to you. How shall you thank him, Ching?"

"With all my gratitude, all my days!" said the girl.

"Ha!" said Sam Li. "Is he offering money for pigs and chickens? Is he asking for words and smiles? When a man holds his life in his hand, he is trying to buy love, Chang. How much will you give him?"

Ripley tried to protest, but the words swelled in his throat and would not come out. He found himself staring with great eyes, afraid; and the girl was staring in the same fear. She was still looking at him when she cried out: "Sam Li, Sam Li, what do you mean? What is it?"

He answered in Chinese. The smooth, deep rumble of his voice played through the intonations and the pitches of that speech as a river lightens and darkens and swells over the boulders that lie unseen in its channel. He had been speaking of love like a grandfather to children, but now a larger theme possessed his voice, and by the inward intentness of her eye Ripley knew that the girl no longer was seeing him. Perhaps the whole majesty of the timeless Orient was speaking now from the tongue of Sam Li; and what did Ripley comprehend except horses, beef on the hoof, ropes, and saddles and guns? He was present here like a non-believer at a temple of mysteries. That was why he shrank slowly back from the girl and found the door, and at last he was outside it and going down the narrow flight of steps into the lower hall.

He passed the open door of the room in which the shrouded bird cage hung. How much that was true and beautiful was shadowed forever from his eyes?

He got out of the house, quickly, and to the side of Hickery Dickery. Why had he given her such a foolish name? She was worthy of something better. Ching or Sam Li—they would not have given to a canary, even, such a nonsensical title. They would rather have picked out a name from among the stars and given it to one of the gleaming little beauties.

He walked up the bank of the river. He was glad that there was a bit of distance between him and the house of Oñate, because he could use all of the steps to help himself back to a proper self-respect. The mare, as her habit was, walked a little before him as soon as she had made sure of the direction; but now and then she paused for him to catch up with her and run his hand over her shoulder and neck. He did this absently. His mind was so filled that it seemed only a moment before he saw the loom of the squat little house where Oñate lived.

CHAPTER XV.

RIPLEY REFUSES.

OUT of the gray of the morning, at the open door of the house of Oñate, a voice growled quietly: "Ripley—Jack Ripley!"

Ripley, brought quickly out of a deep sleep, sat up from the blankets. The house was as dark as the throat of a wolf. Beyond the glimmer of the doorway he saw the black trunk of the tree that gave summer shade to the thresh-

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old. Then a silhouette, half crouching, stole between him and the entrance.

"Never mind, Jose," said Ripley.

Jose Oñate checked himself with difficulty. His muttering voice sounded from a false distance. "No one comes for good before sun-up," he declared.

Ripley was dressing rapidly. Something whispered over the floor beside him—the bare feet of young Juan Oñate. The eyes of a boy are as bright as those of a cat, even in darkness.

"Let me go first, to see," said Juan.

"I'll call if I need you," said Ripley, without a chuckle. He stepped to the door and looked guardedly out. "Is that you, Tolliver?" he asked.

"Here I am, Jack," said Tolliver, stepping into full view.

His hands were empty. He was so narrow in the hips and so big above that he looked like two wrong halves fitted together.

"How are things?" asked Ripley.

"You could make them better, kid."

"You make me feel pretty good," answered Ripley. "Maria, light a lamp."

More feet made hushing noises on the floor. A match scratched; it threw small blue and yellow lightnings through the room. The lamp chimney screeched against its guards, the flame ran across the wick, the chimney settled back in place, and a mist disappeared at once from the heated glass. The four Mexicans stood at gaze. Jose Oñate had his right hand behind his back and his eyes never left the form of Tolliver. Little Anna slipped up to Ripley and caught his hand.

"Away from him—little fool—to touch his *right* hand!" breathed her mother; and the child fled into a corner.

"Come in, Dan," invited Ripley.

"I'd as soon walk into a den of snakes," answered Tolliver.

"They'll never touch you, and they only talk three words of English. Come in. We'll have some breakfast. Maria, fire up that stove."

The woman was busy at once, always glancing over her shoulder every moment towards the stranger. Anna helped her. Young Juan stood by his father in an attitude of one ready to deliver the attack.

Tolliver made grudging steps into the house. He snuffed the air.

"Beans and garlic and peppers. I've smelled this before. Kind of thick to sleep in, ain't it?" he asked.

"I've got a good conscience and that makes me sleep easy," said Ripley.

"Whatcha ever do for the greasers, here?" asked Tolliver.

"Just a little thing a long time ago. Sit down, Dan."

Tolliver took off his hat—with his left hand. He kept the right close to the butt of the gun on his thigh. Now that the hat was off, the gold showed in his grin. Even by lamplight his face was burnished red.

BUT most noticeable of all was the heavy bandage that encircled his head. It covered his forehead almost down to the eyes. He took a three-legged stool, moved it back against the wall, and sat down.

"Sorry about that," said Ripley, nodding.

"About what? The crack over the head? That's nothing. Gave me a hell of a headache, is all. I was gonna peg you out for it, if I caught you."

"Peg me out?"

"Old time Comanche taught me that. You peg a man out on the flat of his back and leave him there. The sun fair burns the lids off of his eyes. His

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face boils up in blisters. His lips crack open. There ain't any shade. A gent that's pegged out, he comes to realize how damn useful a hat is. Understand?"

"You were going to peg me out?" said Ripley.

"It only takes a coupla days," said Tolliver. He laughed a little. His golden teeth flashed. So did his eyes. "You give your man water and everything, but it only takes a coupla days."

"Ever try it?"

"Yeah. Maybe, What's this slop?"

Maria was offering a cup of red wine to the stranger. "Vino," explained Ripley. "They'll pass a lot of stuff down your throat till I tell them to cut it."

Tolliver took the wine. He massaged his bull-neck tenderly.

"You're quite a guy," he said to Ripley. "By God, there's something about you that kind of tickles me. You got a sense of humor, is what's you've got." He laughed, to prove it. Then he took a swallow of the wine. "Lousy stuff," he said. He drank the rest of it and held out his cup for more. "If we hadn't got the Chink back I'd be kind of sore at you," he said.

"You got him back, did you?" said Ripley.

"Yeah, whacha think?" asked Tolliver. "Which brings me down to why I'm here. But these bozos—they don't savvy English, eh?"

"No."

"They don't look it. It's a funny thing the dumb look that a damn Dago has because he ain't got English to limber up his brains. You know what I think?"

"What do you think?"

"It's the swell thing about our country, the education. When you think what schools do. It's a kind of a wonderful thing. The way it limbers up the brains of a lot of these dumb clucks."

"Is that why you came here—to put me in school?" asked Ripley.

"That's good, too. I could laugh at that, another time of day," said Tolliver. "But, getting down to business, I'm going to let you in on something. I'm going to let you right in at the top. You're a lucky hombre, and I'm gonna let you in."

"Who told you to?"

"The chief—the big chief—the top chief of this whole Chink job."

"I thought that Lancaster was the top."

"Him? He thinks he is. He don't know enough to know no better. But the chief wants you; that's the good news that I come to bring you, kid."

"He wants me for what?"

"To take Lancaster's place; and think of that! You only show your mug down here on the border and everything starts to come your way. Lucky ain't any name for it."

"How much, brother?"

"How much? How would I know? If Jim Lancaster don't make twenty grand, I'm a liar. Twenty grand every year! And you step right in at the top of everything — understand? You're the top—under the big chief."

"Who is that?"

"You'll find out, after you sign up."

"How do I sign up?" asked Ripley.

"That's easy, too. You're trusted, Jack. All you have to do is to give me your word of honor that you'll be with us for one solid year, no questions asked. One year for twenty grand!"

He sighed and shook his head.

"The job is running Chinks over the border, eh?"

"Sure. That's the main part. There's a few other little things."

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"I don't want it," said Ripley.

Tolliver rose to his feet. His face lengthened with bewilderment. "Say it again, slow," he begged.

"Tell your chief that I don't want any part of his job. I've seen enough of it. And to hell with it."

"Well—" began Tolliver. He studied Ripley. "I see," he said. "I seen from the first that you were kind of queer. Now I see *how* queer. Cock-eyed, is what you are."

"Suppose you breeze along?" suggested Ripley.

"Asking me to go? Well, what would I want to stay for, in a stinking Dago dive like this? You're turning the chief down?"

"Flat."

"Plain nutty!" decided Tolliver. "But let it go at that! So long, kid. I thought that I was comin' with the band; but I wasn't even out of school. So long. I hope to God you get better brains before long."

He went back to the door.

"You ain't turning this down because you think it's phony, are you?" he asked.

"I know it's straight," answered Ripley.

"And still you—oh, well, there's gotta be damn fools in the world, I suppose."

He turned his back, with this farewell, and walked into the growing light of the dawn, which began to rival the strength of the lamp inside the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

LUCKY CHANCE.

THE slow dawn had reached the stage of rose and gold when a second messenger stood in the doorway of the Oñate house. It was Missouri Slim, bending to look inside. "You!" he said, pointing a lengthy forefinger at Ripley.

"What about?" asked Ripley.

"The boss wants you. Come along." Ripley went along.

Jose Oñate insisted on currying and brushing the gray mare, though she winced under his vigorous touch. The other three Oñates grouped about to watch their hero. Juan held his stirrup. Anna had scrubbed her face to rosiness and lifted it for a kiss. Maria puffed and smiled in the background.

But before Ripley mounted, Jose had a chance to say at his ear: "That man has much devil. Do you know him, *señor?*"

"I know there's a devil in him. It's all right, Jose," said Ripley. He added, softly: "You travel all over this part of the country, Jose. And when you're traveling around, if you see a Chinaman with scars that run from his mouth back to his ears, remember where you saw him and which way he was going. And if you hear a Chinaman sing like a brake squealing and a rooster crowing, remember where you heard it, will you?"

"I shall listen and watch," agreed Oñate. And Ripley swung up into the saddle. He was very far from sure that it was all right. His position with Lancaster, at the moment, seemed strong, but one whisper of the arrangement between Dallas and his deputy would be enough to end the days of Ripley, if it came to the ears of the smuggler.

Missouri Slim, who kept his horse reined half a length to the rear, merely said: "There's a job up the line."

And they took a trail through the hills, with the sun rising behind them and striking warmth against their shoulders.

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"Look here, Missouri," said Ripley, "what made you start hating my gizzard the first time you laid eyes on me?"

"It's a kind of a funny thing, about that," said Missouri, half lost in contemplation. "It's dead easy for me to hate. When I was a kid we used to move around a lot and I was always going to new schools. Well, the minute I got into a new schoolyard I could take a look around and pick out everybody that I was gunna hate."

"How could you tell 'em?"

"It's dead easy if you got a talent for it," answered Missouri. "Sometimes it's a little gent with a quick-looking sort of a face; and sometimes it's a chunky hombre with a grin on his mug and the look of a chaw of tobacco in each cheek; sometimes it's an old goat with a beard, and his chin pulled way in. Sometimes it's just a plain handsome easy-looking hombre like you; but the minute I look I can tell the gent that I've got to hate."

"How does it turn out, usually?" asked Ripley.

"Mostly I'm right. Mostly always right. There's some of them have tried to open me up with knives, and some have tried guns on me."

"But they never got you?"

"They whittled a lot of nicks in me, though, and they shot some chunks out of me, too. But I was always watching, just the way I'll always be watching you."

"If you were Jim, what would you do with me?"

"Tie a rock to your feet and drop you in the river," answered Missouri, cheerfully.

"It does me a lot of good to hear how you stand," remarked Ripley. "What tied you to Lancaster, in the first place?"

"He licked me," declared Missouri. "I ain't very strong, but I'm fast, and nobody never licked me till I run into Jim. He licked me good. It was a hell of a licking." He shook his head and sighed. His smile was that of one who remembers a thing of beauty. "And I been working for him ever since, waiting for the day when I'll have the nerve to tackle him again. Two or three times I've woke up in the morning and figgered that I was ready to tackle him, but when the time comes the courage all sort of oozes right out of me and my stomach feels holler."

"How long have you been with him?"

"I've done enough talkin'," said Missouri. "Even if I liked you, I wouldn't like talking this much. Shinny on your own side for a while, will you?"

SO they kept on the trail in a long silence, while the sun rose higher and the strength of it drenched the sky and set the heat-waves dancing high over rocks and low over the pale, burned grass. At such times the head of a man is apt to fall. He counts the cracks in the ground and listens to the squeaking of the saddle leather and notices the way the sweat starts in small runlets down the neck and shoulders of the horse, drying to salt before they have gone very far.

They climbed to the top of a low divide. Alkali flats spread out from the base of the hills, dappled spots of blinding white. There was not much wind, but it carried an acrid, invisible dust that made the throat instantly dry and sore. A town appeared, the white of its walls softened by one blue layer of distance. It was Dalton, Ripley remembered.

A rider came around the edge of

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some tall boulders, now. It was Jim Lancaster, riding a silken brown gelding with the shuffling feet and the reaching, thin neck of a thoroughbred.

"That's a good one," commented Ripley, as he greeted Lancaster.

"What happened with Sam Li and Ching?" demanded Lancaster.

"A lot of Chinese talk. I didn't understand it," said Ripley.

"How did it sound?"

"Like running water."

"I've heard 'em go along like that," agreed Lancaster. "A girl like Ching, would you think that she'd put up with that fat-faced chunk of yaller tallow? Here's something for you, kid."

He took a flat fold of bills out of his coat pocket and passed it to Ripley. "Thanks," said Ripley, and put it into his own coat.

"That's what comes of gambling," commented Missouri. "You can't please a gambler. No matter how much you give him, he remembers where he's lost more than that, before."

"Will you listen to me, Missouri?" asked Lancaster.

"Sure Why not?"

"I ain't up out of bed long enough to be really awake. So shut up!"

"Sure I'll shut up. Why not?" answered Missouri, pleasantly.

And he was silent as the three went on. "We've got a little job up the line," continued Lancaster. "Nothing very important, but I want you to get your eye lined up."

"Is that a clean-bred one?" asked Ripley.

"As far as I know. I never sat on one that could move like this gelding, Jack. He cost something, but he's worth it. You take a mare like Hickery there. She's pretty. She's like a picture. But there ain't the whalebone and the muscle in her."

"I'll beat you to the three rocks, yonder in the flat," suggested Ripley.

"How much will you beat me for?" asked Lancaster.

"A hundred bucks."

"I wouldn't mind taking the coin. Where do we start?"

"From here!"

"Let her go!" cried Lancaster, and sank the lash of his quirt in the tender flank of the gelding.

There was a furlong of slope to cover before the flat and the incline so lengthened the stride of the brown's long legs that it was half a dozen lengths in the lead before the two straightened out. Then Hickery Dickery laid her ears back and went to work with Ripley slanting his weight forward and giving the mare just enough of a pull to balance her.

A dry ditch cut the flat unexpectedly. The loose-legged brown flung high across it; Hickery clove the air low and long and landed with her nose at the tail of the gelding. The race was in the hand of Ripley. He saw Lancaster throw one glance behind, with fear in his face; then, to the rear the sound of a fall made him glance back in turn.

MISSOURI'S horse was down, scrambling to its feet in haste, and Missouri himself lay flat on his back with his arms flung wide and the wind lifting a cloud of alkali dust from about him. Chance, at last, had stripped Lancaster of his all-watchful bodyguard.

Half a dozen strides brought Hickery beside the gelding, and Ripley tapped Lancaster between the shoulders with the muzzle of his revolver.

"Slow up a little, Jim," he suggested.

Lancaster, over his shoulder, looked

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at the gun and then at Ripley. Automatic muscles pulled his mouth into something like a grin. Then he reined in the gelding.

"Unbuckle your gunbelt," directed Ripley. "Take it by the buckle end and pass it across to me. That's the trick," he nodded, as he was obeyed.

They were at a canter, now. "If it's a play for loose cash," said Lancaster, "I've got about five grand on me."

"It's not a play for loose cash," answered Ripley, hooking the gunbelt over the pommel of his saddle. "It's a play for you, Jim. I've got a steel badge somewhere on me."

"Dallas?" asked Lancaster.

"That's right."

The town of Dalton was near. The three rocks for which they had raced voyaged past them, well on the right. Lancaster was perfectly unmoved in voice and expression; there was only an extra squinting of the eyes as though he were peering at small objects lost in the horizon mist.

"Away back there in the beginning I had an idea," said Lancaster. "About Dallas turning you loose. That jailbreak was a little too slick and easy."

"Maybe it was," admitted Ripley. "I just played the hand that was dealt out to me."

"The thing that beat me was your reputation," confided Lancaster. "You had a pretty clean name. Didn't think you were the kind for a dirty job like this."

"I've been packing that badge all the time. Suppose that you or one of your gang had spotted that badge? I was playing a stake, too, Jim."

"Yeah, you were playing a stake," said Lancaster. He nodded. "It's all right. I ain't hollering. Not me—"

He looked back. "It'll be a spell before Missouri gets on his horse again," he remarked. "All kind of worked out for you at once, didn't it?"

"I started hoping when the horses started running," answered Ripley.

"Old Dallas!" murmured Lancaster. "What did he have on you?"

"A frame that was worth about fifteen years."

"You don't say! Old Dallas using the bean like this—it's sure a happy surprise! What else do you get out of the job?"

"Just a clean slate."

"Wait a minute, kid. You don't want a clean slate. You want a checking account."

"I'm settling down," answered Ripley.

"To what? A house and a job, somewhere?"

"That's the main idea."

"Found the girl, have you?"

"I have."

"Has she found you?"

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," said Ripley.

Lancaster, throwing back his head, laughed heartily.

"That's what beats me," he said, when he could speak. "Jim Lancaster as a wedding present! Can you come anything over that?"

He began to laugh again, putting his hands well back on his hips, so that it was only chance that enabled Ripley to see a lean finger hook down inside the rim of the trousers. A shadowy lump moved up in answer beneath the cloth. "Don't do it, Jim," cautioned Ripley.

Slowly, as though there were reluctance in the fingers themselves, the hand of Lancaster dropped away. "All right," he said. "All right. It was a rotten chance, anyway. Just a little two-barreled, old-fashioned pistol in there, but it's played some nice tricks

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for me when the boys weren't looking. And here we are, old timer. That's Cracken's saloon, where Bozeman killed Little Minnie. There's the blacksmith shop where that road-agent, Duffy, was caught. If I've got to go to jail, it's better to go where I've got such a lot of old memories all around me."

They had entered the main street of the town. A whirlpool of dust formed before them and raced away, gathering size. That was when Ripley remembered that smuggling was only the smallest of the crimes for which Lancaster was wanted. The dust-cloud struck a building; the head of it sailed for an instant longer and then dissolved in the bright air. And all the courage, the keen cruelty, the craft of Lancaster would vanish like that. They would choke it out of him like a wolf at the end of a dragging rope.

CHAPTER XVII.

TEN GRAND.

THE jail in Dalton was an old house with some cages of steel bars erected in a few of the rooms; in one of those cages Ripley housed Lancaster and sent the Negro who was cook and man of all work around the jail to wire the following telegram to Marshal Tom Dallas:

HAVE LANCASTER JAILED IN DALTON STOP TOWN FULL OF HIS FRIENDS STOP URGE YOU COME WITH STRONG ESCORT TO REMOVE HIM FROM JAIL THAT WILL HARDLY HOLD A RABBIT

Then he sat down to wait. The deputy sheriff gave him a double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun, some ammunition, and some weighty advice. "There's a whisper around town," said the deputy, "that Lancaster will pay several thousand bucks to any party that'll pry him out of this jail. If I was you, I'd make up my mind quick, whether I was going to fight a mob or not."

"I've made up my mind," answered Ripley. "Start a whisper around the town for me, will you? Tell the boys that I've loaded both barrels with buckshot."

The deputy sheriff was an albino blond with gray eyes. The yellow of his teeth when he smiled gave his face its most characteristic strength. He smiled now as he looked Ripley over. "I'll tell 'em something else," he said. "I'll tell 'em that you like it!"

In the narrow corridor in front of Lancaster's cell, Ripley made down a roll of blankets for the night and put a chair for the day. He had no intention of letting the prisoner be out of his sight until Dallas took over the responsibility.

From the barred window he could see the drift of the curious villagers past the jail. It was not long before the window of the famous prisoner was located, and after that there was rarely a time when at least half a dozen boys and a few adults were not gathered to stare.

But no visitors were admitted inside the jail.

The day turned very hot and still in the middle of the afternoon. Lancaster lay flat on his back on the cot in the cell with sweat running visibly on his face. He was flat-chested. He had pulled off his outer shirt and his naked arms were white to the elbow, sun-blackened below and covered with hair. Except for the hair, they looked like the lank, powerless arms of a boy. Ripley looked at him with disgust, and

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with a certain pity. The sweat kept on running. Now and then the flat chest heaved for a greater breath, but there were no complaints.

The Negro, Josh, tapped on the door and pushed it open. He left a telegram for Ripley and a small package labeled: "For Jack Ripley. Personal." The "Personal" was in capital letters.

The telegram from Dallas said:

CONGRATULATIONS WILL ARRIVE DALTON TOMORROW EVENING GREAT WORK

When he opened the package he found a thick sheaf of bills, compacted by heavy pressure until they lay as snug as the pages of a book. Lancaster sat up and watched the patient counting of the money.

"Ten thousand," said Ripley, looking at his prisoner.

"That's a good slice," commented Lancaster.

Ripley wrapped the package carefully again. From the door he shouted for Josh, and when the gray-headed Negro came running he said: "You know the look of the fellow who brought this package?"

"He's kind of tall and loose-jointed and—"

"Throw this at his head, will you?" asked Ripley, and gave up the treasure.

Then he went back to his chair and rolled a smoke. The sweat had begun to drip rapidly down his own face; water beaded the backs of his hands.

"I forgot something," he said to Lancaster. "This belongs to you."

He pulled out the fold of bills which the smuggler had given him that morning and tossed it through the bars. Lancaster picked it up and flicked it with the edge of his finger.

"Ten thousand—and this—a nice little start in the world," said Lancaster.

RIPLEY smoked in silence until his lungs began to burn and he found that the cigarette had turned into an inch-long coal of red-hot tobacco. He dropped it to the floor and put his heel on it.

"Kind of excited?" asked Lancaster, still sitting on the edge of his cot.

Ripley said nothing.

"You don't have to fix me up with a set of keys," went on the prisoner. "Just turn your back on me for a while. Just walk into another room and stay there for a bit this evening. That's all you need to do to earn your money."

It was hard for Ripley to meet the eyes of Lancaster. He fought until he could do it, and they stared at one another for half a minute.

"Just a poor, damn fool!" concluded Lancaster, and stretched himself again on the cot.

The night was the worst time. The westering sun threw a square of gold on the wall of the room, and the golden square crawled upwards, stained the ceiling, disappeared.

More people had gathered in the street. There were no women, no children, only men. Drifts of lamplight from across the way fingered them dimly as they shifted slowly from cluster to cluster. Lancaster, his face pressed close against the bars of his cell, peered out the window fixedly at those shadowy forms.

Deputy Sheriff Haley came in and talked in a whisper.

"There's a hundred men in the street and half of 'em don't belong to Dalton," he said. "There's gunna be hell. They're getting together!"

"Say it out loud," urged Ripley.

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"They're getting ready," said the whisper.

The man was a ghost, with his gray face and his mist of colorless hair that matched his soundless voice. "They're gunna tackled this window and smash through the front of the jail at the same minute—"

A noise from many throats broke out in front of the jail like the boom and crash of a wave against hollow rocks. A reverberating tremor ran back though the old frame building.

"They're coming!" gasped Haley. "Oh, God, they're coming now!"

He ran at the door, banged it open, and was gone. A shaft of light moved over the threshold, pale as moonshine, from the electric bulb which hung from the ceiling in the next empty room. Ripley stepped in and smashed the globe with a tap from his revolver. It made a loud pop; the minute fragments of glass rustled against the floor. Some of them clunched under his foot as he stepped back into the darkness of Lancaster's cell-room.

That darkness was not complete, for light entered from the street by the window and painted thin highlights up and down the bars of the cell. Lancaster was vaguely seen as he sat on his cot again. Beyond the window, Ripley saw two dense clusters of men grouped about the trunks of a pair of massive cottonwoods.

"Listen, kid," said Lancaster, so quietly that the words entered the mind of Ripley as easily as thought, "they're going to pry me out of this, anyway. But it's not too late. If you pull out of here you still get the ten grand."

FEAR skyrocketed from the bottom of Ripley into his brain. Another loud shout roared at the front of the jail; a heavy weight crashed against the outer door; and all the fear drained away with electric tinglings through the arms and the fingers of Ripley. He held the riot gun under his elbow.

"I can see you, Jim," he said, "and I'm going to save the second barrel for you. Salt that idea down in your head for the cold weather; you may be able to use it."

Lancaster said nothing. But he came to the bars of his cell and gripped them with his hands, and waited.

That front door, Ripley remembered, was reinforced with bands of iron; it ought to hold; but the battering went on steadily and into the boom of the strokes came a brittle splintering. The next yell of the crowd began in the distance, but finished suddenly inside the jail. The door was down!

And feet were trampling thunder out of the wooden floor; someone was yelling: "This way!"

Ripley looked back through the window. One group remained close to the shelter of its cottonwood; the other cluster was advancing cautiously. So he pulled his Colt and drove a bullet just over their heads.

They dived backwards for safety. He had time to see that, and how the first group had disappeared behind the other cottonwood. Then the racket of the intruders exploded into the next room.

Someone was shouting: "Get the light! Where's the light? What's wrong?"

Through the open door, Ripley fired one barrel of the shotgun, high. The big slugs ripped and crashed across the ceiling. A redness remained across his mind—the long, crimson flash of the explosion.

"Close in on him!" they were shouting.

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Then Lancaster screeched: "Keep back! He's got the second barrel ready —he'll blow you to hell, you fools!"

The crowd that was lost in the blackness paused. They groaned as a heavy wagon groans when its brakes take hold, down hill. Ripley broke the gun and slipped in a new cartridge.

"Ripley," called the unmistakable snarl of Missouri Slim. "If you walk out of there with your hands stuck up we ain't gunna hurt you. But if you stick in there we're gunna go in and tear you to pieces."

"Boys," said Ripley, "it's a good bluff, but it won't work. I put that first charge into the ceiling. The next one is for you. I've got a riot gun, here, and riot guns can see in the dark. I'm going to count to five, slow, and then you can have it."

He shouted in a louder voice: "One —two—three—"

The darkness must have helped him, the breathless dark that brings the fear of death close to the face of any man. He had hardly called the third count before the wave began to roar again, but this time it was a clattering diminuendo.

True to his word, he fired on the fifth beat. The shot rattled through wooden partitions. A whoop of anxious fear answered him from the last of the fugitives. And then the sounds began to issue from the echoing rooms of the jail and rise, small and harmless, in the outer air of the night.

He looked out the window. From the cottonwoods men were breaking away down the street at full speed. "Thanks, Jim," said Ripley. "Thanks for putting in that good word at the right time."

"I was talking for myself, brother," said Lancaster.

After a moment he added: "Dogs are wonderful, Ripley. I've been a fool all my life. I've never put in enough time with dogs. Snakes are pretty good, too; and rats. But men are a lousy lot."

CHAPTER XVIII.

YELLOW TALK.

FOR a time noises went up and down the town of Dalton. It seemed that the long night silence would never begin; just as perfect peace gathered a single rider would bolt his horse up the main street. But finally the quiet was complete. Lancaster began to snore softly. Through the western window, Ripley looked so long and earnestly that he saw the stars falling towards the horizon. For his own part, he kept telling himself that the wait would not be long. Dallas had promised to come by the evening of the next day and in what new way could his strength he tempted? They had tried bribery—they had tried the rush of a mob—and yet there remained in him a tenseness and tremor of mounting expectation which he could not argue away.

He was not asleep, hours later, but it was from a semi-coma that Lancaster roused him. The voice was husky, panting; it reminded Ripley of something which he could not place exactly in his mind, though his heart was sickened.

"Ripley—Jack—where are you?"

"Here," said Ripley.

"Get a light, will you? For God's sake, turn on a light!"

"I can't show a light in here. You know that."

"Why can't you? They're not even watching. They've given up. They'll never lift a hand for me, now. Turn

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on the light—any kind of a light. I can't breathe! The damn darkness is choking me like steam."

Even if it had been safe to illuminate the room, Ripley would not have wanted to see the face of Lancaster because he had recognized at last the midnight terror.

He pulled his chair closer to the bars. "Take it easy, Jim," he advised. "I'll talk to you. You're all right. You'll forget all about this when the morning comes."

"The morning's gunna be the start of the day that brings Dallas here. After he gets his paws on me I'm finished. As soon as he lands me, the jury reports me guilty, and the judge puts on the black cap, and the death-house is opened up, and the hangman begins to knot his rope. D'you hear me?"

"I hear you, Jim. Steady it up, will you?"

"Listen to me; talk to me, will you?"

"I'm right here, talking."

"You never seen what I seen. You never seen a man hang. Did you?"

"No, I never did. Forget it, Jim."

The sickness increased in his heart.

"How could I forget it? When I stood down there in the little crowd, there was a bird chewing gum and making it crack on his back teeth; there was a reporter taking down notes. I looked up and saw the platform and felt as if my own ghost was about to walk out there. After a while they did march a man out. And he—"

"Quit it, Jim, will you? This won't do you any good."

"Lemme talk it out. I've got the words in my throat and if they stick there they'll choke me. This hombre was only a kid. A good looking kid with a tow head. He was white, but around the mouth he was green-white; like the belly of a lizard. There wasn't anything in his eyes. Nothing you'd ever seen in the eyes of anybody. Just emptiness. They had a minister along with him. The minister talked to him in a sing-song voice, and his glance wandered a good bit. You could see that he didn't give a damn about the business. He was making his bread and butter, I guess. It was an old story. The poor kid kept nodding and answering, and the minister droned along like a September afternoon."

"You'd better lay off this talk, Jim," said Ripley. "You'll empty out all the sand in your craw if you keep on like this."

"Listen to me!" insisted Lancaster. "I looked around and the hombre with the gum was still chewing it, and the reporter was making little sketches of the dead man—that's what he was—I wanted to say—I wanted to yell out—'Damn you, get down on your knees—he's a dead man!'"

THE voice of Lancaster screamed out suddenly, flaring like a strong light through the darkness, and the soul of Ripley shrank to nothing. The unexpected yell jumped him out of his chair. He thrust a hand through the bars and caught Lancaster by the shoulder.

"They'll never get you to the rope, Jim," he said. "You've got too many friends and too much money. You're going to beat this rap."

Lancaster caught the hand of Ripley in both of his.

"They put a black hood over the face of the kid," he whispered. "Ever have an ether cone choking you? Two seconds of that is bad enough, but it's nothing compared with the black cap—the standing there—mind you, stand-

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ing, and waiting—and God, they took forever before they dropped him. How could I stand the waiting? I'd begin to screech like a woman. Listen to me, Ripley—"

"I'm listening, all right. Remember you're away out here in Dalton in a jail that's more full of holes than a Swiss cheese. Nothing has happened to you, yet."

"I'm going to give you the inside steer," said Lancaster. "This job I've had has been worth thirty grand a year, steady. And here's what'll make you laugh. I've been taking a fifty-fifty split. Me heading up everything and doing all the work, and still paying out a fifty-fifty split. Why? Because the other bird started the show and asked me into it. But I'm ready to grab the business all for myself, now. If you get me out of this hell-hole I declare you in. Listen, Jack, you're a straight-shooter. You're the squarest kid in the world. I declare you in, for life. Not one year. Every year. Thirty thousand a year, for always. No matter what I clear, you get that. You can't say no to me. Not a white man like you—you wouldn't send me up to stand there with the damned black cap over my head—and—"

Ripley put his other hand through the bars and gripped the lean shoulder of Lancaster. He shook him. "You're talking yellow. That's all you are. You're a yellow coyote. Take this!"

He drew his hand back and flicked the flat of it across the face of Lancaster. Then he stepped back from the bars. His knees were water under him. But there was no more hysteria from Lancaster; there was only the gasp and wheeze of his breathing.

After a time he said: "You're right, Ripley. The rope isn't going to get me. Not till I've had one try at you. There's a kind of a God somewhere, and I'll get one whack at you, brother!"

The silence was better than the screaming or whispering voice of the hysteria, even when Lancaster began to walk up and down behind the bars, his footfall padding softly. The dawn came. It showed the vacant house of old Dalton stuck up on the central hill like a black fist raised against the morning. It showed the glimmering of the windows of the town, and then the eyes of Lancaster as he slouched up and down behind the bars. Afterwards, slowly, the day poured across Dalton and the western wind began to come with a regular and warm pulsation through the window. Lancaster lay down and slept.

Old Josh brought two breakfasts of bacon and eggs and slabs of cornbread and huge mugs of coffee and cream.

"My Lord, boss," he said to Ripley, "you sure tore things up. There was fifty of them. This nigger counted fifty of 'em, all rashin' and dashin'. But, Mr. Ripley, he kicked 'em out faster than what they all run in! Ain't Mr. Lancaster gunna wake up for his breakfast?"

"Mr. Lancaster's all tuckered out," said Ripley, softly. "You take his tray off and bring it back hot when I tell you to. Mr. Lancaster needs a powerful lot of sleeping, just now."

A COMMITTEE of three angry and eminent citizens appeared later in the morning, with Deputy Sheriff Haley accompanying them. He was more than albino pale. Ripley stood in the open doorway of the cell-room and hushed the loud voices of the three.

"Lancaster is all in. He needs his sleep," said Ripley.

"I'm Tug O'Brien, of the General

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Merchandise Store," said a big block of a man. "Speakin' of sleep, where was this here brave deputy sheriff sleepin' when the gang of roughs busted into his jail, last night? The rest of us in town put on a rotten show. But it was hard for us to get together—and there was a lot of those hombres hollering around. But what we want to know is where was our hired man all that time? Why didn't he keep 'em away from the outside door of the jail the same as you kept 'em away from *this* door?"

Ripley looked at the deputy sheriff and found him still and cold, submissive to the stroke that was to fall, empty of eye as that tow-headed lad Lancaster had described. No black cap had been dropped over the head of Haley at the moment when his reputation was to be put to death.

"What did Haley care about the outside rooms of an empty jail?" asked Ripley. "He let the rest go and came back here with me."

"Hold on!" said Tug O'Brien. "Is that straight? Nobody heard a yip out of him if he was in there with you."

"The best kind of fighting dogs don't bark," answered Ripley.

"We've made fools of ourselves," declared Tug O'Brien to his companions. "Haley, if you'll shake hands with me I'd be obliged."

Haley shook hands, but his vacant eyes took little notice of what was happening. There was nothing in them save dim bewilderment as he studied the face of Ripley.

Mr. O'Brien concluded his mission to the jail with a brief and effective speech. "Ripley," he said, "they tell me you told that gang that a riot gun could see in the dark. I'm here for the whole damn town to tell you that blind men could see the sort of stuff that you're made of. When the jail of a town gets cracked open all the thugs that are on the loose go for it to make headquarters in a soft spot, but you changed all that last night. We won't be forgetting you!"

He marshalled his two companions and they left at once, while the deputy sheriff still stared at Ripley.

"What I wanta know," said he, "is why you did it—after I run out on you like that?"

"Well," said Ripley, "even champions are no good after they've been licked—and counted out. You haven't been counted out, Haley. Nobody even saw you take it on the chin. So what the hell? Forget it and pull yourself together for next time."

"That's right," sighed Haley. "There's another time to come. Will you shake on it?"

"Sure," agreed Ripley.

Haley leaned a good deal of weight on the proffered hand; then he stepped back and added: "A fellow like you, Ripley—a fellow like you—"

He finished off the sentence with a gesture as vague as his look; but he had managed to include universes in that wave of his hand.

CHAPTER XIX.

SECOND CHANCE.

THE morning grew old, with a relaxing warmth that spread content through Ripley. Outside the window there was a steady attendance of boys, big and small, and wide-eyed little girls who stared as though the steel bars discoursed enchanting music for their ears.

There was no sense of pride in Ripley, or only a meager one; but chiefly he felt an enlarging relief as the

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day grew older, tending towards the evening which would bring Tom Dallas and an end of anxiety. To stay in the same room with the wolfish eyes of Lancaster was hard enough; and still there remained an uneasy expectation of things to come. Those on the outside who had made two such efforts to secure the release of the prisoner would try at least one time more.

It was after noon, and after lunch, when Josh brought in a neatly wrapped package addressed, like the first one, to "Jack Ripley," with the "personal" in capital printed letters.

"Take it back!" exclaimed Ripley, without opening the thing. "Take it back and chuck it right in his face."

"That first fellow—I hit him with it, all right," chuckled Josh, and withdrew.

He returned with an air of apology a moment later. The bringer of the package had disappeared, so Ripley received it with unwilling hands.

He sat down and weighed the parcel. Of course the wise thing was to leave it unopened, but he trusted that the sneering face of Lancaster would reinforce his virtue. And it was a larger, a much larger and heavier packet than the first one.

He lighted a cigarette. "We'll take a look and see how much they want you, Jim," he said.

"Yeah, you'll take a look, all right," said Lancaster. It was the first time he had spoken since that midnight horror.

There were the same compressed stacks of bills, but far more of them. He divided the mass in quarters and counted one. Twelve thousand dollars. Four times that—

"Fifty thousand, Jimmy," said he. He tried to laugh. The laughter split to pieces and crackled in his throat. He was agape, thirsty, and what he held between his hands could assuage that thirst forever, he felt.

Sin is a comparative thing. For a big sin there should be a big man. He, Jack Ripley, was big, was he not?

But his fingers, against his will, persisted in rewrapping the bundle, tying the strings tight. Then they tossed it through the bars to Lancaster.

"Damn you!" snarled Lancaster. "Why do you pass it up to me? Do you think *that* can hang with me?"

And he kicked it back so that it skidded to the feet of Ripley. A panic broke out in him. He strode to the door and shouted for Haley. The deputy came on the run. "Take this damned thing!" said Ripley, and threw the packet. It missed the hands of Haley, struck his chest, and, rebounding, rolled back again to the feet of Ripley.

"Sorry I missed it," apologized the deputy sheriff. "What is it?"

There was a fate in the way that money had returned to the feet of Ripley; and who can resist the urge of his destiny? Ripley picked up the parcel.

"It's nothing. Don't bother about it," he explained. "Just—a sort of a joke—that's all. Nothing that matters."

The thick, close heat of the mid-afternoon came over the jail before Lancaster broke out: "You've got the stuff. What are you going to do about it?"

"Give it back to the hombres that sent it. Who are they?" asked Ripley.

"So you can pass the word to Dallas and rope them in?" said Lancaster, and the fire burned up in the dark hollows of his eyes. "Listen, Ripley—every minute is getting closer to the time when Dallas ought to show up!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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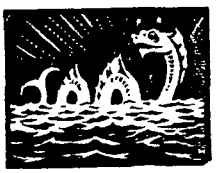
STRANGER *than* FICTION



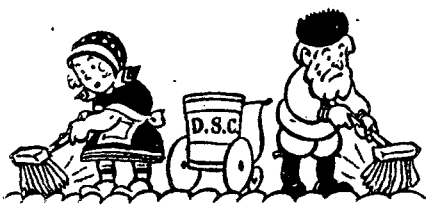
By JOHN S. STUART

PERSONALITY IN LICENSES

IN Spain the owner of a motor car can exercise his own ingenuity and taste in a license. The authorities permit the licenses to be manufactured privately, but the car has to be officially registered, with the customary payment of fees.

ANCIENT COUNTERFEIT

ACCORDING to an ancient piece of paper money on exhibit in the Princeton University Library, copper money was extensively counterfeited in the Fourteenth Century in China. The note is thirteen inches long and nine inches wide, and is printed in black and red on paper made from mulberry bark. It bears a warning to counterfeiters: "The Board of Revenue, having petitioned and received the Imperial Sanction, prints the Great Ming Treasure Note, to be current and to be used as copper cash. The counterfeiter shall be decapitated. The informant and captor shall be rewarded with 250 taels in silver, and in addition shall be given the property of the criminal."

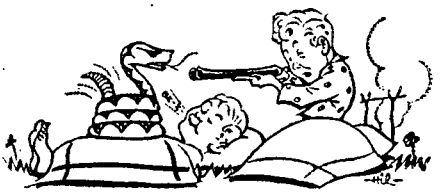


FINNISH EQUALITY

FINLAND was the first country to give women the vote — in 1907 — and since that date women have been eligible for election to the Chamber. Equal rights in Finland apply to other things also; women have an equal right to work, and it is not uncommon to see both a man and woman sweeping the streets at the same time.

THE FIRST SKYSCRAPER

CHICAGO had the first American skyscraper. The first building so known was erected at La Salle and Adams Streets, Chicago, in 1884-5. It consisted of ten stories built on a steel frame, and was designed by Major William Le Baron Jenney for the Home Life Insurance Company of New York.



SWEET DREAMS!

TWO boy scouts in California went on a camping trip. Just about dawn the elder was awakened by a strange noise. He looked at his companion who was still asleep. Coiled on his chest was a rattlesnake. The elder lad quietly reached for his shotgun, aimed, killed the snake, blowing it off the boy's chest. His companion awakened with a start, unhurt. The snake was five feet long and had fourteen rattles.

NEW YORK TO HONGKONG BY RAIL

PLANS are secretly under way to construct railroads that will unite New York and Hongkong. The route will probably run from Seattle to Dawson City; thence to Fairbanks, Alaska; and to the point on the coast nearest Asia. A tunnel will bridge Bering Strait, and the trans-Siberian railroad will be extended to the Asiatic end of the tunnel. This rail venture, if carried out, will bring to the world's markets untold billions of dollars' worth of minerals, timber, oil, fish, wheat and furs.

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The outlook was hopeless, but only one complained

The Weakest

By CAPT. WILLIAM OUTERSON

The biggest man in the boat was the first to go overboard —to a startling fate

THERE had been eight men in the boat of the foundered Cynthia, but the mate had died from injuries received in the wreck, leaving in command the bo's'n, who knew all about seamanship but nothing of navigation, and could not determine their position. He sat in the sternsheets with one hand on the useless tiller, the other resting on his thigh, his fevered eyes staring westward at the skyline, where he hoped to see the loom of land before long. Behind him and astern, the sun was rising on a clear windless day, and if land or a ship was not sighted before another dawn these old shipmates would die one by one in the agonies of thirst, as he would die.

Larry sat on the after thwart in front of bo's'n, his elbows on his knees, staring ahead, and Frenchy crouched beside him, his hands hanging limply between his legs. Nibs moved his head continuously from side to side, searching the round horizon for a ship that might heave in sight any minute and save them from madness and death. They had subsisted for some time on a single mouthful of water once a day, but now the precious stuff was finished, the breaker had been smashed and its damp staves gnawed and sucked for the slight moisture they contained, and now they were left they knew not how far from land without a drop of water.

They labored at the oars all night in the cool air, but in the daytime such toil could not be endured by their wasted bodies, and sleep would not come to ease their sufferings. The sun beat down, grilling out of their gaunt frames the little fluid they still held. The outlook was hopeless, but only one of them made complaint, and he did

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not belong to their group of tried and proved friends.

Scotty sat forward, his bloodshot eyes scanning the vast inactive sea, silent, without a ripple within the skyline. Graham drooped beside him, his left arm resting on the gunwale, his right hand lying open, palm upward on the thwart. The lips of all were cracked and discolored, their tongues swollen, their skins dark and glazed like parchment.

Rawson, the biggest man in the boat, but far from the strongest, groaned and shook his clenched hands at the sky, cursing the merciless sun.

"I ain't goin' to stand this any longer," he croaked in a hoarse whisper that came clearly to the ears of his mates. "Ruther than die like this I'll go over the side. I'm burnin' up. My blood's cakin'. I'm goin' crazy." His voice rose to a scream and died in a whimper.

The others turned on him brief glances, dull and indifferent, and resumed their listless attitudes. They were stronger men, accustomed to face death with no outcry. The sun rose horridly, beating on the unprotected boat as if with malignant purpose. Graham stared down at the water, his sight so affected by the fever of thirst that the color of the sea looked different.

RAWSON ceased his moanings and stood up in the boat, swaying from side to side with weakness. He screamed frightfully, lunged outboard, threw himself into the sea head first. They turned their terrible eyes on the place where he sank and saw him rise again, put down his lips and drink avidly, sucking in the water with great gulps. He ceased for a moment, looked up at the men in the boat and yelled in wild excitement:

"This is sweet water!"

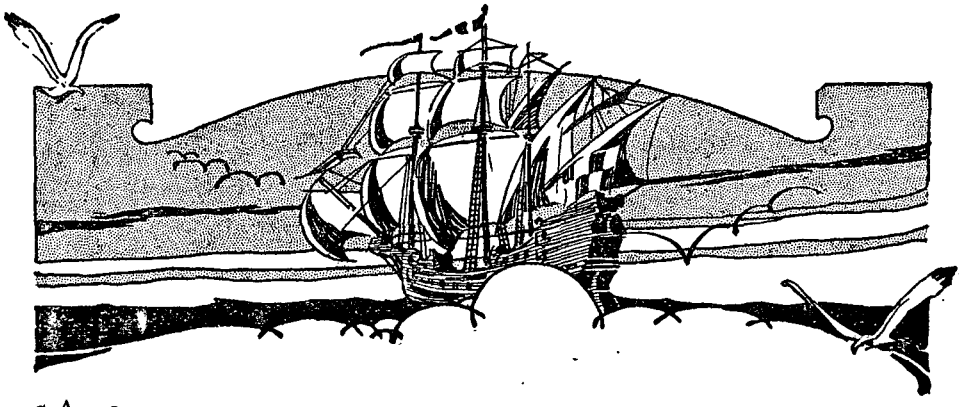
They thought him insane, but something stirred in Graham's mind regarding the color of the sea, and he cupped a handful and brought it to his lips.

"It *is* fresh water," he cried hoarsely and swung over the gunwale to slake his intolerable thirst. The others followed him headlong.

Bo's'n spoke when all had drunk their fill:

"We're at the mouth of the Amazon, where the sea water's fresh for fifty miles offshore. Now you can put your weight on the oars, my bullies, and we'll make our landfall before mornin'."

THE END



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MEN of DARI
By Stook Allen
STRONG MAN OF TURKEY
The present benevolent dictator of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal, first had to struggle to weld a ragged mob into an efficient fighting force; then, after driving opposing legions to the sea, he effected the modernization of a disorganized realm. After setting aside a ruling dynasty he attained autocratic sway and established a one-house government.
GHAZI MUSTAFA KEMAL
OF JEWISH-SPANISH ANCESTRY, ALTHOUGH A MOSLEM BY BIRTH, MUSTAFA WAS WAS BORN IN SALONIKA IN 1881. WHILE ATTENDING SECONDARY SCHOOL IN SALONIKA, THE LAD, AGAINST HIS FAMILY'S WISHES, ENROLLED SECRETLY IN THE MILITARY ACADEMY AT CONSTANTINOPLE. HE WAS AN EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT AND HIS TEACHER NICKNAMED HIM "KEMAL", WHICH IS ARABIC FOR PERFECTION. INTERESTING HIMSELF IN POLITICS, MUSTAFA GAVE EXPRESSION TO SENTIMENTS AGAINST THE DESPOTIC SULTAN, ABDUL HAMID, WHICH WOULD HAVE MEANT EXPULSION FOR A LESS POPULAR STUDENT.
GAZETTED A LIEUTENANT, MUSTAFA WAS BANISHED IN 1905 TO DAMASCUS BECAUSE OF HIS ADVANCED IDEAS. THERE HE FOUNDED THE SECRET SOCIETY "VATAN". IN 1907 KEMAL WAS PRINCIPAL LIEUTENANT TO ENVER BEY, WHEN THE LATTER, HEADING THE YOUNG TURKS, EFFECTED ABDUL HAMID'S RETIREMENT FROM THE THRONE.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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SERVING INCOGNITO, KEMAL DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF IN THE TRIPOLI CAMPAIGN AND FOUGHT WITH MARKED GALLANTRY THROUGHOUT THE BALKAN WARS. THOUGH FRANKLY PRO-ALLY AT THE START OF THE WORLD WAR, MUSTAFA, BY THEN A GENERAL, CONTRIBUTED MATERIALLY TO THE REPULSE OF THE BRITISH AT GALLIPOLI. ONCE A SHELL SPLINTER HIT HIM OVER THE HEART, BUT HIS WATCH CASE SAVED HIM. HIS MILITARY GENIUS WON HIM THE TITLE OF PASHA.
PEACE FOUND TURKEY PROSTRATE AT THE FEET OF EUROPE. GREECE, HER ANCIENT FOE, SOUGHT TO EXPAND INTO ASIA MINOR. IT WAS THEN THAT MUSTAFA, IN DEFIANCE OF THE GREEKS AND THEIR ALLIED BACKERS, SURPRISED THE WORLD BY DRIVING THE GREEK ARMIES OUT OF WESTERN ANATOLIA, AND BY STANDING OFF THE ALLIED FORCES WHICH HELD THE STRAITS.
DURING THE BATTLE OF SAKARIA, MUSTAFA'S HORSE WAS WOUNDED AND THE PASHA BROKE A RIB IN FALLING. HOWEVER, HE REMAINED ON THE FIELD TO DIRECT THE FIGHTING.
EMERGING WITH THE TITLE OF "GHAZI" (THE VICTORIOUS) HE BROUGHT ABOUT THE ABDICATION OF THE SULTAN AND SET UP AN ENDURING MODERN REPUBLIC. ELECTED PRESIDENT OF TURKEY IN 1924, MUSTAFA HAS BEEN TWICE REELECTED. HE IS VIRTUALLY A DICTATOR.

Next Week: Donald B. MacMillan, Intrepid Arctic Explorer

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East River

By BORDEN CHASE
and EDWARD DOHERTY

"I swore I'd break you," said Jumbo

Crawling through slime and sand beneath the river, these human sand hogs laugh at death

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

THE strong and courageous men who face many dangers working under high-pressure air in the construction of a river-tunnel are known as "sand hogs." Bossing the gang of the East River (New York) tunneling are Jumbo, a tall, stalwart giant of man, and his pal, handsome Shocker Jack Duggan. The latter befriends Lee Murray, a young, attractive girl, who has come to New York in search of a job. Shocker takes her to the Hog Hole, an eating and drinking place owned and operated by Amy, a good-hearted middle-aged woman, who is in love with Shocker, and who, in turn, is loved by Jumbo. Amy gives Lee the opportunity of singing in her place. She makes good and is admired by everyone.

Both Amy and Lee come to have a common interest in the tunnel activities, for Lee finds herself falling in love with Shocker. One day a fire starts in the tunnel and the river is allowed to come in by lowering the pressure of the air. It appears for a time as if the entire gang will be drowned or scalded. The heading-face nearly collapses and the men become panic-stricken. Shocker attempts to direct the men, but Jumbo reminds him that he is the heading boss. Shocker strikes Jumbo in "mutiny" with a pick-handle. Shortly after—when the tunnel difficulty has been straightened out, and the majority of the men saved—Jumbo and Shocker fight it out down below in the tunnel because of the "mutiny." Both are really battling over Lee.

Later on, there is another serious blow in the lock. Amy is wild with grief. Shocker and Jumbo are in danger; and Lee has disappeared. Shocker is caught in the tunnel after the majority of the heading gang have extricated themselves. Jumbo goes down below after Shocker, swearing to "get him," believing that Shocker had run

This story began in the Argosy for October 6

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off with Lee. Shocker is rescued, but Jumbo comes up with one of his legs paralyzed.

CHAPTER XIX *(Concluded).*

"I'LL LEAVE IT TO THE CARDS."

THEY drove in silence for a while, each waiting for the other to begin. Lee looked up at the stars, and breathed in the fresh air and the scent of flowers, and listened to the clop, clop, clop of the horses' hoofs, and the purr of motor cars that whizzed on by. She began to sing softly—

Why do I weep?
Why do I sigh?
Why do I sorrow
And wish I could die?

"I'm going away, Lee," Shocker said, looking at nothing at all.

Some day I'll sing.
Some day I'll dance.
Some day I'll live through
Another romance.

A meteor streaked its brief moment through the sky. Love was like that, she thought. Darkness and the stars—then a rushing glorious burning supernatural moment, then darkness and the stars again, just as before. Just as before? Ah, no. It could never again be just as it was.

"I love you," Shocker said. "But I'm going away."

She made no answer. The cab rolled on.

"Did Amy ever tell you about Ed Powers?" he asked.

"No."

"He was a sand hog, a hydraulic boss on the day shift. He married a girl named Nora—a nice girl. About your size. And your build. A pretty girl. She had brown eyes, too. He worked with me on the Holland tunnel job. He was paying on a house and a lot of furniture. Nora was going to have a baby. Then the Leviathan came up the river and grazed the top of the tunnel. She cracked a couple of plates and the river dropped in on us."

Lee's heart was beating like the hoofs of the horse, clop, clop, clop, clop. Her hands were locking and unlocking themselves. She waited for him to go on, staring at his profile. He seemed to have turned into stone.

"Was any one hurt?" she asked.

"Nora's hair was black—black as Jumbo's hat. I saw her, standing outside the doctor's office, while Ed was in the medical lock. He was in the lock all night. When he got out he looked at Nora, and didn't know her. Her hair was white—all white. Amy's hair is white, too. She puts henna on it, but if you look at the roots—"

He felt Lee's hand on his left arm, and turned to face her.

"Now, do you see why I won't marry you?" he asked.

"No, I don't. I'm not afraid of white hair—if that's what you mean."

"No, it isn't what I mean. White hair is nothing. It's what turns it white. No sand hog ought to marry. Every sand hog's wife knows that. Sometimes she has to support a crippled husband as well as a bunch of kids. Lee, for God's sake, believe me. I love you too much to marry you."

"You love the tunnel, you mean," Lee said hotly. "If you didn't, you'd give it up. You say you love me, but you don't want me to be a sand hog's wife. Prove it. Give up the tunnel. I don't care what you do. I love you, too. I love you more than my life. I don't care if we starve together. I don't care if you have to make your living selling shoe-strings."

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Shocker's good arm held her tight. He kissed her, long and passionately. Then he released her.

"That was good-by," he said.

Lee wept, not in pity for herself, but in anger.

"Amy was right. No woman can compete with a tunnel. She warned me not to fall in love with you. But I couldn't help myself. All right; it's good-by, then. I'll tell Mulroy."

"Mulroy? Has he asked you to marry him?"

"Yes, he has. A dozen times."

"Well—I wish you luck. He's a good fellow. And he's not going to be a sand hog long. I knew it would be Mulroy all right! Marry him! I'll be in Belgium. I won't see you. I'll grin and bear it. I'll cable you my best wishes—Mrs. Mulroy!"

"You needn't be sarcastic."

"I'm not being sarcastic."

"You are. Anyway, it wasn't marriage I was going to talk to him about. To-night, just before we left the Hog Hole, he showed me a letter from Woods. He wants me to be the leading lady in his play."

"He wants what?"

"And I'm going to tell him yes. I'm going to be an actress. Some day I'm going to be a star."

Shocker grabbed her to him again, and glared.

"You're sweet," he said. "You're lovely. You're my idea of a girl. But you're lying. You're trying to make me jealous."

"I'm not, I'm not. I told him I'd think it over. I wanted to see you first. Oh, I knew you had intended to go away and leave me. I wasn't asleep when you came into the doctor's bedroom this morning and kissed me."

Scowling, he kissed her again. She pulled herself away from him.

"I heard you say good-by. I thought you were going because you hated me. I don't see how you could think of going—if you loved me. I wanted to be sure you did—or didn't—before I told Mulroy anything."

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"What will you tell him?"

"I'll tell him thanks, I'll take the job."

"You'll tell him to go to hell. That's what you'll tell him."

She rested her forehead against his shoulder and wept.

"I would have given it up—the dream, the ambition of my life—to marry you. I'd let my hair turn white overnight. I wouldn't care. I'd go crazy every time you left me and crazier every time you came back to me. But—I'd stand it. I went crazy last night, watching you in the lock. I thought you were dying!"

SHOCKER held her tighter, tighter.

"But you," she went on, "you! Would you give up your tunnel for me? You would not! You'd rather run away—to another tunnel. What do you care what becomes of me? You don't care. And yet you try to keep me off the stage."

Shocker became aware of automobiles going swiftly by, couples in the back seats; of men and women strolling across the grass, two by two, of sweethearts sitting on a bench, of a baby crying in a woman's arms.

"Raise your head and look at me, South Wind," he bade her gently.

She obeyed meekly.

"Everybody in this park is either married, engaged, or in love," he said. "Everybody except our cabby. Did you really mean that? You'd throw up your career to marry me?"

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"Sure."

The cab left the east-west cut-over that runs into Seventy-second Street, and started down an incline toward Central Park South. Masses of buildings rose out of the shrubbery, skyscrapers with thousands of windows, each window a shining star.

"You see all those stars over there, Lee? That's the most glorious sight in in New York—in the whole world, maybe. Yet all those lights put together wouldn't be half as bright as your eyes. And all the beauty you see spread out before you isn't one-hundredth part the beauty of your face, nor a thousandth part the beauty of your mind."

She snuggled close to him and looked up through squinting eyes, and saw his brush of hair centered in the yellow moon.

"The moon's put a halo around your head," she whispered. "You're a saint, Shocker. And your hair shines in my eyes."

"A saint? Sure. Saint Shocker of sand hogs. A hell of a saint, I am."

The cab went on through the night, keeping to the right, skirting the wet sweet grass. Clop, clop, clop, clop.

"You were just another girl to me, at first," he said. "But you wouldn't play my game. And I couldn't play yours. I fell in love with you. More than I can make you believe. I didn't want to. I tried not to. But I did. You crushed me. You dynamited me. You blew me to hell. You made me sick with hunger for you. Between you and the tunnel I was a homicidal maniac. I wanted you both. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Then listen. You are extremes. You and the tunnel. The tunnel is what I am. My life. Whisky and cards and dice and danger. Driving hard men. A free and easy sort of life with no regrets. Live to-day. You may die to-morrow. High air. Men who fight and curse and lie and cheat you and give you their last drink, their last dollar, their last breath. Jumbo would give me his life. I love that big no-good Scoewegian more than I love my own father.

"I love the tunnel, but it's done something to me I can't forgive. It's toughened me, coarsened me, cheapened me. I'm ashamed. It's taken away the ideals I used to have. And given me in return—a little money, thrills, the horror of drowning, the staggers and the bends, whisky and women, self-disgust, nothing good but Jumbo."

The spell of talk was on him. She listened avidly, fearfully, not quite sure she understood. His words beat on her brain with the rhythm of the horse's hoofs. Clop clop, clop clop, clop clop.

"East and west. You and the tunnel. You are the life that used to be mine. The life I want back. Things that meant something to me, once. Things like pride—ambition—study. You're all the girls I used to know, and wonder about, and shyly worship. The little pigtailed girls at school. The high school beauties with ink on their fingers and mischief in their eyes. The co-eds, eating fudge and talking about life. All the girls I knew before I knew the tunnel. Innocence rediscovered—and unrecognized.

"I've loved other girls, since I hit high air and booze. Or thought I loved them. But the tunnel was more to me than they were. Hard as it is, dirty as it is, it held more romance for me, gave me greater thrills. Those girls mixed with the tunnel. You don't. You never will."

"I do," she cried. "I will."

She pulled his head down. She kissed him, sobbing, panting.

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"You're mine," she said. "I'll never let you go. Why can't you have me and the tunnel? Why can't we mix? I love you. I love you more than God. You can't throw me over. You can't get rid of me, Shocker. Please don't talk like that. You scare me."

He quieted her with kisses. He laughed at her. "That's the West Wind blowing now," he said. "The sweet West Wind! Oh, darling, all I was trying to say was—marry me and let the tunnel go to hell! I love you more than a hundred thousand dirty tunnels!"

She understood him then. And if she was happy she was frightened too. He must not quit the tunnel. She did not want him to. Some day he might hate her for it.

"Take me home," she said. "There's too much moonlight here. It makes everything unreal. Kiss me and take me home."

CHAPTER XX.

JUMBO AND MORAN.

HALF a hundred sand hogs from the west side crossed the river as soon as they had ended their second shift, to see how badly the east end was damaged, to talk over the blow with those who had gone through it, and to brag about themselves and the progress they were making.

They drifted into the Hog Hole in groups, to find it packed with enemies and friends. They bought drinks. They talked. They laughed. They gambled. They asked innumerable questions of Jumbo.

The big man, enthroned at the long table, sat rigidly in his chair, suffering tortures, his hat pulled low over his eyes—except when he pushed it back and wiped his beaded brow—his head bent over the cards. He seldom looked up, and he made it plain he was tired answering questions.

"Get this," he roared. "I'm not making any alibis. I lost that heading. But let me tell you this. I seen lots of bad blows in my time; but this was the toughest run that ever hit a tunnel."

The orchestra played at frequent intervals. East siders and west siders settled down for a sociable evening. The laughter died down, and the boasting and the talk of rivalry.

"They got a good miner on that job to-day," you might hear—a little pocket of talk in a sudden silence.

"And a good helper, too."

There was a legend among the sand hogs, half jest, half solemn, that a tunnel was being driven in the Great Beyond.

"They got two good helpers," Jumbo said. "Creadon and Casey. I'd of gone to hell for either one of them."

"Not Creadon, Jumbo," some one called. "Didn't you hear? The river spit him up like a bad oyster. All he got was a wetting."

Jumbo lifted his head and stared.

"On the level?" he asked.

"Sure," a dozen voices assured him.

"Where is he?" Jumbo roared. "The beggar owes me twenty bucks."

Amy set a glass of whisky at his elbow, winking at him. That was a prop she had forgotten. She sat down near him out of the way of the players, but close enough to give him any aid he might require.

"He's not brooding now," she thought. "That won't stop the horrible pain in his leg—but it will keep him from thinking of himself as a permanent cripple. Action, talk, concentration on the game—if he could have that all the time! But he'll be days, maybe

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weeks, lying in bed. He can't fool these men to-morrow. He may not even fool them to-night. But he's trying. That helps. And he's saving his pride. His damnable pride! To-morrow—"

She tried not to think of tomorrow. She watched him deal the cards. Bills were stacked high in front of him, and half dollars and quarters. He had been winning steadily all evening, first with a mucker as his partner and then with "Old Spindle Shanks," the miner. Mulroy had come in late, but in time to be his third partner. Keyed to a terrific pitch by pain, Jumbo had run the bank up recklessly. Now he dealt an ace and a queen to a mucker at the far end of the table, and lost the bank. He split his winnings with Mulroy. They were now, temporarily, on their own, betting against the new bank.

"Will you buck it with me?" the shield driver asked.

"Naw," Jumbo said.

Mulroy bet and lost. The bank was doubled. Mulroy bet again and lost. He tried it the third time—and again he lost. Jumbo took the heel of the next bank and won.

"A while ago, Jumbo," Mulroy said, "I thought I was the luckiest guy in the world. I was wrong. You're the lucky stiff. And Shocker—he's even luckier than you."

Jumbo snarled at that. Jumbo was rather good-looking, Mulroy decided now, in some astonishment. He wondered why he'd never noticed that before. His face was taut, concentrated, presenting sharp clear-cut lines, strong manly lines.

"It's because he acts so hard-boiled I never thought of him as the handsome hero type," he reflected. "I'll have to do a little rewriting on him before rehearsals—make him less of a skunk and more of a tiger."

He was walking toward the door when it opened to let in some more of the west side hogs. Among them, Mulroy saw, was Nipper Moran. He decided to stay. There might be some fun.

NIPPER, with four of his men, went to the bar, and loudly called for whisky. Amy set a bottle on the bar, and four glasses.

"Pour it," Moran shouted. "What's the matter with you? What kind of service is this? Are you a cripple?"

Limey poured the drinks. They vanished in a second. He poured four more. They, too, were swallowed hastily.

"Where's that dancing broad?" Moran yelled.

Amy reached for her bottle and started toward him. Moran threaded his way through the tables to Jumbo's side.

"So you lost your heading," he cried. "And a couple of men with it. What's the matter with you? Don't you know how to drive a tunnel? Maybe I better send one of my muckers over here to show you how it's done. Any man I've got would make a better heading boss than you, you lousy false alarm."

Some of the hogs rose from their seats, to get a better view of the battle. The scraping of their chairs against the floor rasped on tautened nerves.

Every one expected action. Jumbo would say nothing. He'd just start a swinging overhand punch as he rose to his feet. But Jumbo didn't rise. Men moved all about, forming a circle about the table.

Jumbo's cards fell out of his hands. He shoved his hat back from his forehead—and every one saw he was

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sweating profusely. They watched him grip the table with his great hands. They heard him say:

"Yes, Nipper, we did have a little trouble to-day."

His voice was mild—too mild for his friends, too mild for Nipper Moran. He laughed, loudly, and picked up Jumbo's untouched glass of whisky. "Sit there and sweat, you yellow bum," he shouted. "You need something to cool you off? Take this!"

He dashed the contents of the whisky glass into Jumbo's face, and followed it up with an open-handed smash to the jaw. Jumbo reeled in his chair.

But Moran did not enjoy his triumph long. An avalanche of fury hurled herself at him, swinging a bottle. The bottle crashed against his skull. He dropped.

Brandishing the shattered neck of the bottle at Moran's men, grouped and silent about his outstretched body, Amy cursed with salty oaths learned in her years of keeping the Hog Hole. "Get out of here," she cried at length. "Get out before I cut your throats!"

One of the four hastily removed his hat; but none of them moved.

"Get out," Amy screamed, "and take that disgusting thing on the floor with you before I smash another bottle on its ugly head. Drag it out and wash it down the gutter."

The four men looked around them, saw nothing but hostility in the faces of other men. They seized Moran by his arms and legs and carried him out. Nobody said a word until they were gone. Others from the west side followed them. The east siders stood and stared at Amy and at Jumbo—still silent. His head had fallen. His shoulders sagged.

"I'm closing up," Amy said. "The game's over. The bar's closed."

The sand hogs filed out, Mulroy in their lead, going slowly, looking at each other in comic bewilderment, saying little. Limey, taking a hint from Amy's eyes, put on his hat and coat. Amy closed the door and bolted it, and hurried back to Jumbo. Jumbo had lurched forward and rested his head on his folded arms. His body shook with heavy sobs.

CHAPTER XXI.

SHOCKER LEARNS ABOUT JUMBO.

OUTSIDE Lee's door, Shocker kissed her goodnight.

"I'm going to tell Jumbo tonight," he said. "Now."

"No," Lee begged, her hands reaching to the lapels of his coat, as though they would deter him. "Don't tell anybody tonight. It—it's bad luck."

"Bad luck?"

He stroked her hair.

"Please, Shocker. I'm sincere about it. You won't, will you?"

"I wouldn't tell the big stiff the right time," he assured her.

The peculiar expression vanished from her face, and she stepped back from him. "Just stand there, and let me fill my eyes with you, darling," she said. "Let me look at you as though I were seeing you for the last time, and knew it."

"Look at me as you did the first time," Shocker said.

She stood gazing at him, light shining out of her eyes, her body motionless. "I love you so!" she whispered. "Kiss me again — as though you'd never kiss me again."

Shocker laughed at her. "Don't be afraid," he said. "You'll see me again and again and again. Every day and every night—until I die."

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He smiled at everybody he met on the street. He nodded to people. He whistled merrily.

There was a crowd of men in front of the Hog Hole. Wouldn't those muckers be surprised when they learned? And what would his iron-men say at his desertion?

"Hello, you drunken hogs," he greeted them cheerily, half a block away. "Holding a revival meeting? Where's Preacher Jones?"

They waited in ominous silence until he came close. Then Mulroy told him.

"You lie," Shocker cried, taking a quick step forward and grabbing Mulroy's shirt. "You lie—and I'll prove it with one hand."

"No, I'm not lying, Shocker."

"Pull your wrench," Shocker shouted, pushing the shield driver from him. "Pull your wrench. I'll make you eat it."

"'E ain't lyin', Shocker," Limey protested; "hindeed 'e ayn't. Hupon my word, 'e ayn't. Jumbo, 'e sat and took it—so welp me!"

Shocker let go Mulroy's shirt, and the breath whistled through his teeth. "Oh, I knew he'd get drunk," he said. "But not that drunk. He's never been that drunk before."

"He wasn't drunk," Mulroy said.

Shocker gazed about him dully.

"That's waht 'urts," Limey pointed out. "'E was cold sober, 'e was. 'E looked like a man waht 'ad lost 'is 'eart!"

Shocker went slowly up the stairs to the Hog Hole. "A man what had lost his heart!"

"Sure," he thought, "that's it. The heart went out of him when he learned he was wrong about me—when he learned Lee loved me. Did he love her so much? No. He thought I was sore—that I'd quit him. He figured I'd marry Lee and leave the tunnel. What did he care about Moran? Or anything Moran did? The big lard-head! He'll be laughed out of the union. He'll never work in the tunnel again. I've made a bum out of him. I did! He always was a bum. He shouldn't be allowed in the tunnel again. He ought to be kicked out of the union. The oak tree with the heart of pulp. The elephant with the guts of a mouse."

He sat on the top step and groaned. "Jumbo or Lee. What choice is there? What fool would even hesitate? I've quit the tunnel. I've quit him. To hell with him. A guy that'd let a louse like Moran slap him in the face! That'd smile at the mongrel's heel taps! I should give up Lee for him? I'll see him damned first!" He got up and hammered on the door.

"Jumbo," he called. "Hey, Jumbo! Let me in, dumb-bell. It's Shocker, you dismal failure. I've come back." It angered him that nobody answered. "Let me in, you unpedigreed poodle. Open the door or I'll break it down. Hey, Jumbo! You fish-eyed scarecrow. If they named an elephant after you, it wasn't on account of brains."

THE hogs were still in the street, talking it over, when he walked down the steps. He went around through Amy's garden, and let himself in through the unlocked kitchen door. Amy was in the kitchen, pouring hot water into a dishpan.

"Where's that big excuse?" he asked.

"Lay off the wise cracks or I'll scald you," Amy said. "He's in my bedroom. And you be careful what you say to him."

Jumbo, in ridiculous red and white striped pajamas, lay crosswise on the little bed. He grinned at Shocker, but

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said nothing. Shocker laughed—bitterly, but it was plain he found no comedy in what he saw.

"Come out of that circus tent," he said. "You're not drunk, and you're not sick, and you're not handcuffed. Why do you let every two-cent comic in the tunnel call you yellow? Why didn't you paste Moran?"

Jumbo stirred, painfully, and rose on one elbow, sweat streaming from his face.

"That's right," Jumbo roared. "Stay in your kennel and yap at me. Come on over here and I'll paste you."

Shocker's eyes narrowed, then opened wide. He was about to make a retort when he felt something jab him in the small of the back. He heard water slopping behind him, felt heat on the back of his neck. He jumped out of Amy's way.

"One side, ass," Amy said tartly, setting the pan of water on the floor and sliding several towels into it. "It should have been your tongue and not his leg that was paralyzed."

"Paralyzed?"

Amy picked up a towel, dropped it hastily with a smothered oath, picked it up again, let it drip for a moment, then wrung it out.

"Roll up his left pants leg," she bade Shocker.

Shocker accomplished the task mechanically.

"Paralyzed! Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me? Ain't I his friend?"

He laughed, in a desperate attempt, it seemed to Amy, to keep from crying. He shoved his fist with brutal tenderness against the big fellow's jaw. "Paralyzed," he said again; but now there was scorn in the word. "He'll be dancing on that leg in a few days—dancing on Nipper Moran's stinking carcass. And what a swell dance floor that is."

Jumbo grinned. "Sure," he said. "Sure, Shocker. Amy and Doc Schreiber both think I'm through. But you and me know better, don't we?"

"Through?"

Shocker turned quickly and looked out the window. "Through?" he repeated. "Schreiber must be getting old. He's in his dotage. Why didn't he give you some pills? And why the hell didn't you go to one of the medical locks?"

"They were full," Amy said. "You were in one of them, weren't you?"

Shocker whirled around. "I got to go," he said. "I'll be back—but I got to go."

AMY rose up from her knees and blocked his path. "Go? Go where? Out to spread the news? Why do you think he went out in the barroom to play cards? For fun?"

"I'm going across the river," Shocker said hotly. "I'm going to get an iron-wrench, and spread Nipper Moran's head around the west end of the tunnel. If I wasn't crippled I wouldn't need a wrench."

"Come back, Shocker," Jumbo said. He sounded as though he were weary. "Leave Moran alone. I'll be all right in a few days—and even if I'm not, I'll break that guy some day. I'll break him! With my hands, I'll break him. He'll never drive another heading. I promise you that."

"And I promise you this," cried Shocker, in a white heat, "that even if you're paralyzed forever — even if you're never a heading boss again, you'll meet him. You'll meet him where his legs won't help him any—and your legs won't hinder you. You'll meet him where a man doesn't need any legs."

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"And now," said Amy, "if you're through making a whistling jackass of yourself, go see what idiot's pounding on the front door."

Shocker clumsily shot the bolt, turned the key in the lock, and swung the door open. Mulroy was there, panting in excitement. He thrust a letter into Shocker's left hand.

Shocker looked at the small well-formed letters. It must be from Lee. It was a love letter, he thought. He looked away from Mulroy.

"She's gone," Mulroy said. "She came by in a taxi a few minutes ago. There was a suitcase near the driver. She stopped the cab, called me over, gave me the letter, said goodbye—and beat it. I went to her flat. She's packed and gone."

Shocker handed him the envelope.

"Open it, will you? It takes two hands."

Mulroy tore off an end, extracted the letter, unfolded it and handed it over. The paper shook as the iron-boss read it,

I love you as you are. I don't want you changed, ever. I can't take you away from the tunnel. I can't take you from Jumbo. You'd never be the same. You'd hate it. Some day you'd hate me. I'm going away, darling. Yesterday it was you. To-night it's I. Goodbye, Shocker. Goodbye, darling. I can't write any more.

He thrust the letter into his coat pocket.

"Come on in," he said, leading the way into the bedroom.

Mulroy paused. "Can you make it all right?" he asked.

"Make it?" Shocker asked, surprised. "Sure I can make it, you fool. Is a bum wing going to stop me from walking?"

"You better take a drink, though," Mulroy said, still somewhat concerned. "You look like a man with the staggers."

They walked into the bedroom, and Mulroy told the news. Shocker, sitting in a chair by the bed, listened as though he'd heard it for the first time.

"She's smarter than I thought," Amy said calmly. She wrung out another towel and placed it on Jumbo's leg. "I don't blame her for going. Jumbo leering at her one moment and beaming the next, not knowing whether to kiss her or pat her head. Shocker all wrapped up in himself like a ball of gold twine, waitin' to be unraveled for a Christmas package. Makin' himself hard to get. And Mulroy making goo-goo eyes and readin' her passionate lines out of Mother Goose.

"A fine lot of lovers. You don't deserve a girl like that. None of you. I hope you never set eyes on her again. Sand hogs! Nobody but a fool would marry a sand hog. Pour me a drink. Pour me a big drink. And take one yourself, Shocker. You look like a ghost."

CHAPTER XXII.

AMY'S SACRIFICE.

THE tunnel was cleared in a week, and went swiftly on its way through the bed of the river. In that week the Manhattan end forged ahead; and Shocker, promoted to heading boss and commanding Jumbo's old shift, whipped his men with insane frenzy to the task of catching up.

"You let a west side bum come over here and laugh in your faces," he shouted to his gang as they went back into the tunnel. "You stood and watched him smack a helpless man—one of your own, the best that ever ate

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high air. You sneered at him—because he was paralyzed. You're afraid of Nipper Moran, aren't you? What a lot of tough guys! What a lot of men!

"Well, you'd better be man-sized if you're going to work for me. And you'd better work too. If we don't beat that polecat to the middle of the river—if we haven't passed the west side by July—I'll tie a can to the tail of every skulking one of you. I'll get a lot of high school girls down here to make tunnel. At least they wouldn't be afraid of Nipper Moran! Nipper Moran—the only cur left of his litter! All his brothers and sisters were drowned before they had their eyes open. Nipper Moran! The first one of you I catch stopping, even to wipe the sweat off his ugly mug, I'll smash like a cardboard box."

This was the kind of talk they liked. They worked. They were proud to work for a man like that.

The vein of quicksand was of brief extent. The shield once more encountered the blessed blue clay, and then common river sand. The east side began to overtake their rivals. They never let up. If they dropped from exhaustion, as they did at times, it was after they left the tunnel. And on the night they learned the west side was slowed up by boulders that had to be blasted, every man of them got drunk.

The pain in Jumbo's leg subsided slowly, but the limb was left twisted and stiffened, and an inch shorter than it had been. In spite of this, he was stubbornly positive that he'd walk again—"walk like a man"—and that he'd take back his old job as heading boss. The men humored him in this—and showed him pity only when his back was turned.

"What am I going to do with him?" Amy asked Shocker.

They were in her garden, a tiny rectangle of lawn, with a string of rose bushes growing near the neat green picket fence. Amy, a pair of Jumbo's old gloves on her hands, was spraying the flowers.

"We'll build bridges," Shocker said. "Bridges or railroads. He can do that. He can boss a gang. He knows rock. He knows dynamite. He knows quite a little engineering. I'll take care of him."

Shocker lit a cigarette, sat in Jumbo's chair, and watched her for a moment. "You think I'm kidding, don't you? I'm not. I almost graduated from Michigan as an engineer. You didn't know that, did you? And my old man's an engineer, too. You didn't know that either, did you?"

Amy crawled on her knees to the next bush.

"No, I didn't," she admitted, "though I did hear you say once that you ran away from home."

"Yeah. I ran away to work with Jumbo. And what have I got for it? Nothing but grief. I pretty nearly broke the old man's heart. He was so set on my having a career. Every letter I get from him asks me to leave the tunnel, and become an enginer. Dear Son Jack. He's in Australia, and he's got a job for me. Well, if there's a job for me, there's one for Jumbo too."

"Jumbo. He won't build bridges. Anyway, I want to take him to Samoa. There isn't a tunnel on the whole island, Shocker. Isn't that heaven?"

"It may be to you. Amy, bridges will be his salvation. Take him to Samoa. Stay there awhile. It will do him a lot of good. I'll go along with you. We'll tell him they're building a tunnel there. The fathead won't know we're lying. When we get him there—

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I'll spring Australia on him. Australia and a bridge. He'll come."

Amy thought it over a long time. "Thanks, Shocker," she said. "Samoa it is. But just me and Jumbo. For once in your life, give a woman a break. I've never been entirely alone with him since I met him. Let me have a—well, a honeymoon. Will you?"

Shocker didn't laugh, as she suspected he would. "Sure," he said. "Better that way. You sail from New York. I'll stick around a few weeks—then fly to San Francisco and take a boat from there. I'll still beat you to Samoa, Amy."

Amy sighed. It was easy to read Shocker. "You'll find her," she said. "When you do, tell her not to hate me. Not that that will do much good. She can't help hating me."

"You're crazy, Amy. Why should she hate you? You were like a mother to her."

"I was. I was, Shocker. I still love that kid. And so does Jumbo. Like a daughter, Shocker. A daughter we've lost. I'd give anything to find her for you. We had words, the day she left. Bitter words. I struck her."

Shocker looked at her with wise eyes, and looked away because he saw too much.

"Was it like that, Amy?" he asked.

"It was," she said. She drenched a bumble bee with the sprayer. "But that's gone, Shocker. I'm going to marry Jumbo—some day soon."

Shocker flipped his cigarette through the picket fence. "I'm glad, Amy."

She picked a dead leaf off a bush, rolled it in her fingers, held it to her nose.

"I was going to marry Lee, and quit the tunnel. But I couldn't quit. On account of Jumbo. You know why she went away? On account of Jumbo."

"You'll find her. Keep on looking. It's wearing you thin. You look lousy, Shocker. But you'll find her. You've been looking in the wrong joints. She's not in any cabaret or dance hall. You'll find her haunting the job like a little ghost, watching the river boils at night, watching the gantry steps by day—with a shawl around her, like those other women, hiding in a doorway when you come."

She put down the spray and took up a trowel.

"I'm glad you told me," Shocker said, getting up. "It explains a lot to me, Amy."

She did not look up until he left her. She watched him as he walked away, the sag of his shoulders bringing a lump into her throat. He was still dear to her, dearer than ever since she had given him up. But the jealousy he had caused her had softened, or died. On account of Jumbo.

"It's Jumbo," she thought, "that ties us all together and keeps us all apart. We've all made sacrifices for him, Shocker and Lee and I. Which of us has suffered most? Not me."

THE river lay in the moon-wash, rippled and calm. The boils, so near together they looked like one, jetted liquid silver. The harsh lines of the buildings across the stream were softened, mellowed. The bridges made black and silver geometrical patterns against the summer sky. A single star hung poised above the span.

Amy felt strange, sitting on her parapet by the river's edge. Strange because it was only Shocker who was below that nearest boil. Shocker, and not Jumbo. Strange because she was watching the boil for the last time.

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Twice a day, six days a week, for seven years and more, she had sat near the edge of some wide river and watched a dancing blob of white. And now no more. To-morrow, around noon, the hogs would hole through. To-morrow night she would be on her way to Samoa, Jumbo's bride, done forever with waiting and watching and worrying. Done with love. She had never loved Jumbo. Not as she loved Shocker. She never would love him—like that.

Yet she was not unhappy. Jumbo had need of her. Jumbo would always need her. It was good to be needed by a man. Something moved in the shadows near her, something with feet. Amy cried out, "Lee," and ran, seeking her. But she found no one.

"Lee," she cried again. "If you have any pity, come back. Come back, Lee. Come back!"

She waited long—but there was no answer.

She went to the Hog Hole, looking for Shocker.

"'Im hand Jumbo," Limey said, "they went to Mulroy's, Miss Imey. Baht arf an hour ago, I should s'y."

Their last night together, Amy remembered. Let them enjoy it if they could. She went through the dining room into the kitchen, stole down the back steps, into the street, turned again toward the river. Lee might have come back.

MULROY cursed when the door bell rang. He tore up a sheet of paper on which he had been writing, threw down his fountain pen, and went to the door. "Who's there?" he asked.

Shocker gave the sand hog's rap, and Jumbo bellowed.

"Open up or we'll break the door."

Mulroy turned the key and swung the door open.

"Sit down," he said, none too cordially. He led them into his bedroom—a tiny place that also served as his study. He opened a bureau drawer and solemnly took from it two pint bottles of whisky. He gave one to each. Sand hog etiquette thus observed, he turned on his friends bitterly.

"I got to rewrite the last scene," he said. "You guys don't mind?"

They didn't answer, being busy extracting corks. Mulroy didn't expect an answer. He sat down again at the card table, took up the pen, and started to write. He clutched the pen tightly, as though it might get away from him somehow. He threw it down to light a cigarette. He picked it up, wrote a few more words, flung it down again.

"You guys want coffee?"

Not waiting for an answer, he stepped into the adjoining kitchen and turned up the gas under the pot, lighting it with a parlor match.

"I got to drink black coffee," he said. "And smoke cigarettes. I bet I smoke three packs a night. And every once in a while I got to get up and walk. Stick to the tunnel, you guys. It's easier than writing a play."

Shocker looked around the room. He'd seen it many times, just as it was now. But it was always a shock to him. Cigarette ashes were everywhere, and cigarette stubs. The floor was littered with crumpled and torn sheets of yellow paper. Cups and saucers, sloppy with coffee and cigarette stubs, littered the bed that had been pushed into one corner of the room to make a space for the writing table. Empty whisky bottles marched across the charred and stained top of the bureau. The room was so full of smoke one had difficulty

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reading the titles of the books that lined one wall.

"Woods hasn't heard anything?" Shocker asked.

Mulroy shook his head. "Not a word. She's never been near his office. Never called him up."

He came into the bedroom, a thick cup of scalding coffee in his hand.

"Woods wants me to dirty her up," he announced.

Shocker smiled; but Jumbo didn't understand.

"She's too clean to be box office," Mulroy explained for Jumbo's benefit. "He wants me to give her a past. Not too broad a past. Just a past."

Shocker took a long drink out of the flask.

"Well?"

"Well, nothing. He ain't going to get it."

He finished his coffee, topped it off with a swig from his own bottle—half covered by a pile of yellow paper—took up the pen and wrote a few more words.

"Listen," he said, after scratching out what he'd written. "Maybe you guys can help me out on this. Here's the situation. The heavy that's 'Masters'—is asking her to quit the Hog Hole. He offers her the moon with a gold fence around it. Then he gets fresh and she bawls him out. Listen, and see what you think of this, will you?"

He threw down the pen, pawed over a sheaf of papers, stopped to light a cigarette, threw a stub on the floor and stepped on it, and shed page after page to the floor, walking on them, looking for the right page to read.

"Oh. Here it is. Listen. They're in the Hog Hole. The orchestra's playing off stage; and a black-jack game is going on. And you can hear dice players trying to make their point. Listen.

"Masters—'I didn't mean no offense, Baby.'

"Lee—'Don't call me Baby.'

"Masters—'Aw, Baby—'

"Now I want to get something right in there that'll squelch him. See? How can a lady call a man a — well, something not too dirty — and still be a lady?"

"Crown him with a bottle," Jumbo said, rising and taking a second pint from the bureau drawer. It was his only contribution to the conversation. While the drawer was open, he took a pint for Shocker too.

Mulroy dropped his cigarette into the dregs of his coffee. He took off his coat and vest, his tie, his shirt. He picked up the pen again. He scribbled furiously for a moment, then rose and paced the room. He went into the kitchen, and came back munching a cracker.

"Who is this heavy?" Jumbo asked. "Is the heavy the villain?"

"The river's the villain," Mulroy said. "From the rise of the curtain until it falls on the last scene, the river's your menace."

Shocker stood up quickly, putting his unfinished pint on the table.

"I've got to go," he said. "Come on, Rock-head. Let's clear out of here and let the man write."

Mulroy stared at the two until the door hid them from him. "I shouldn't have mentioned the river," he thought.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOLING THROUGH.

JUMBO, in a new blue serge, sat in the little garden, enjoying the sun, and looking every few minutes at the thick watch on his wrist. Every

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sudden sound disturbed him, made him look around. Now and then he tugged at the brim of his new black hat, or pulled at his tight stiff collar. Shocker might come any minute.

"This is a crazy mess," he thought. "Everything's happening all at once. Sometime today they're holing through. Sometime today I'm getting married." He looked at his wrist watch again. He wiped his forehead. "Suppose he comes too late!"

"Hey, Jumbo. Want to see something swell?"

The big man turned his head quickly and saw a little boy peeking through the fence pickets. He relaxed, grinned.

"Hello, Franky," he rumbled. "Haven't seen you since the day you brought me a clean shirt. Come on over."

He thrust a hand into his pants pocket, fingering some change. "No, you come over," the boy said. "I got a tunnel. You got to see it, Jumbo. It's a real tunnel."

Jumbo laughed, picked up his cane, and hobbled toward the gate, taking care not to step too near Amy's rose bushes. Amy was a crank about her roses.

"A tunnel, huh? Sure. I got to see a tunnel."

He looked around. No sign of Shocker. No sign of the minister. No sign of anybody but the little boy. He looked at his watch. Plenty of time. He went through the gate, and the boy led him toward an up-ended packing box in the vacant lot, at the base of which was a hole, the dirt from which had been thrown in a pile close to the fence. An old shovel, discarded from the tunnel job, lay on the heap of earth.

"This here's the gantry," the boy said proudly, exhibiting the box. "And this is the tunnel—and that pile over there's the muck pile."

Jumbo patted the boy's hair. "Say, that's swell," he boomed. "That's as good a tunnel as even Shocker Duggan could drive. Let's go down to the heading and have a look around."

He picked up the shovel. It felt good to his hands. He planted the cane in the ground and got to his right knee, forgetful of his good clothes. He pretended to be examining the tunnel.

"We got to do a little more mucking out, though," he said, "so's we can get the rest of the gang in here."

He thrust the shovel into the earth—and was lost. The dirt flew over his shoulder. Jumbo laughed. This was sport. This was something worth while. He worked furiously, the boy looking on with admiration. After a few minutes Jumbo felt compelled to take off the tight coat. He flung it to one side.

Then he removed his wrist watch and threw it onto the coat. His muddy fingers jerked his collar a little looser, and undid the knot in his brand new blue tie.

THE shovel went to work again, the dirt kept flying over his shoulder. The tunnel lengthened. The boy sat down and gave advice.

"Well, you overgrown mole, will you never grow up?"

Jumbo came to himself with a start, and turned a guilty face to Shocker. Seeing Shocker he grabbed for his cane and reared himself up.

"Where the devil you been?" he demanded. "I thought you'd never come. What time is it?"

"Time to get in your work clothes," Shocker said. "Everything's ready. My shift gets the honor of holing through. And I got you okayed by Doc

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Knott for the air. You'll be my lock-tender."

Jumbo glanced apprehensively toward Amy's windows.

"Come on," he roared. "Don't stand there like an old woman before a looking glass."

"But your clothes, Dumbbell. You can't go down in the tunnel in your best clothes." Jumbo hobbling toward the street, the shovel in his right hand, the cane in his left, made violent answer.

Shocker followed, laughing. The boy watched silently.

"Jumbo!" he called, beginning to cry. "Jumbo, bring back my banjo!"

LIMEY rapped at the living room door. Amy, finishing her wedding dress, didn't look up.

"The 'ogs is gone, Miss Imy," the bartender said. "Hall gone down for the 'oling through."

"Shocker go with 'em?"

"Yes, Miss Imy."

Amy smiled. Now she could be married in peace—though it seemed shameful to be married without Shocker's knowledge. But Jumbo had insisted on it.

"Aw, Amy," he had said, "I just can't have that guy know my name. He'd never get over it. Imagine him listenin' to me sayin', 'I, Cyril, take thee, Amy.' He'd bust out laughin' in the preacher's face, and I'd have to smack him down. A hell of a weddin' that'd be."

She bit off a thread, put the dress reverently on the back of a chair, touched it gently, and hurried into the barroom.

"Now sweep up good, Limey," she said, "and open the windows. And put on a clean apron. You got to be spotless. And you say, 'Yes, your reverence,' or 'no, your reverence,' when the minister comes. And give the dames a cocktail on the house. There'll be two of them. The witnesses. If they come in the next few minutes, keep 'em amused.

"Give 'em a pack of cards. They might want to play solitary. How do I know? I got to get things straightened out. The settin' room's a sight, and I ain't dressed."

She hurried back into the living room, and surveyed it with despair. It looked something like a sewing room in a corner of the baggage room at Grand Central, she thought, what with all the trunks, and suitcases, and the littered floor.

She bore the dress, and a yard or so of tulle, into her bedroom. She kicked two card board boxes under the couch, threw another one behind Jumbo's old-fashioned trunk, and got a broom from the kitchen. She herded pins, and bits of thread, and crumpled tissue paper, and torn yellow patterns, and remnants of silk and tulle, drove them through the short corridor between the living room and kitchen; left them in a corner, covered by a dust pan. She settled the cloud of dust she had caused, sprinkling water on carpet and floor and chair seats and legs, gathered up the travel pamphlets and chucked them into the open drawer of a wardrobe trunk, closed the sewing machine and wheeled it against the wall, straightened the rug, hastily wiped the table top of dust, shoved the chairs closer under the table, and hurried down the stairs to Jumbo.

But Jumbo was gone, and her roses were ruined. Some of them were completely buried, some stuck their top branches through the dirt. There was an old tomato can blooming on one. The bones of a cat decorated another.

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Branches hung down, torn and broken. Leaves and petals drooped, and dirt trickled from them. A little boy stood outside the fence, crying. A coat lay out in the lot.

Amy hurried through the gate, picked up Jumbo's wrist watch, rubbed the mud from its face, and snatched up the coat. She shook it vigorously. Then she turned to the boy.

"Don't cry, sonny," she said gently. "I'm not crying. See?"

"Jumbo," the boy wailed. "He's gone. He was playing tunnel with me, and he went away; and he took my shovel with him."

Amy let the coat drop, and threw herself down. She gathered the child into her arms.

"He'll come back," she said. "We don't mind the shovel, do we? Nor the roses.

"Nor anything at all—so long as he liked it—playing tunnel with you. He did like it, didn't he, sonny?"

"Sure he liked it," the boy said, still sobbing, "but he liked the real tunnel better."

"Of course he did," Amy said. "Of course he did. But he never can play in real tunnels again. Not after to-day. Never after to-day. We'll not scold him when he comes back, will we? I'll buy you a new shovel—with a nice red handle on it."

She rose and put the coat under her arm. The boy smiled at her through his tears and put out his arms to her.

"No," he said. "We won't scold Jumbo, will we?"

Amy swooped and raised him in her arms, and kissed him, and wiped sudden tears from her eyes.

"How'd you like a big piece of wedding cake?" she asked, pressing the little face close to her own, and carrying him through the gate. "And how'd you like to be best man at our wedding—a little sand hog?"

THE men crowded into the cages and dropped swiftly to the bottom of the shaft, wondering why Jumbo had come with them, and what he was going to do with that old shovel, and where he got the red suspenders, and why he looked so dirty and so happy and so grim.

The man-lock stood open, waiting them. They jostled and shoved each other inside, cursing, shouting, and laughing, three of them bringing along their musical instruments—two banjos and a saxophone. Shocker, entering last, took the shovel from Jumbo's hand and threw it away. He closed the door. Jumbo limped to his place by the valves and laughed savagely as the air roared in.

Shocker stood beside him, touched, glum. This, he knew, was Jumbo's last trip into the tunnel—into any tunnel. The men knew it too. Everybody knew it but Jumbo. Shocker knew that smiles were needed.

"Don't go so fast," he shouted—for the benefit of the new man, the one with the saxophone. "You might shove us off the track."

"Tha's all right, boss," the new man said. "Speed's mah name. Clarence Speed. The mo' faste' you goes, the mo' bette' I likes it."

The door groaned finally, and Jumbo opened it. He watched the hogs pile out, and turned to Shocker, his eyes burning with strange fire.

"Remember," Shocker said. "Five minutes after you bring in the super and his party. I'll be waiting."

"I'll be there," Jumbo bellowed. "I'll be there."

He stood watching as the men went down the incline; two of the iron-gang

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plunking on their banjos, everybody singing—everybody but the man with the saxophone.

This man blowed lustily, but made no sound. His cheeks puffed. His eyes strained. The cords in his neck stood out plainly against his ebony skin.

Looking at him, the men roared with laughter. Two of them rolled on the floor of the tunnel, kicking their legs and holding their sides. The tunnel rang with their screams.

"Blow that thing, brothe'," Frenchy shouted. "Blow it till you busts. But it won't do no good. Don' you know you can't get no sound out o' a wind inst'ment down heah? A man can't even whistle in this air. Go on, Gabriel, blow that ho'n. It won' wake nobody in the tunnel."

Jumbo didn't laugh; he didn't hear.

Halfway down the tunnel stood three flat cars, on which rested an iron pipe thirty inches in diameter and fifteen feet in length. The motorman was standing near the tiny locomotive, ahead.

"All set," said Shocker. "Hook on, and bring that yule log to the heading."

The locomotive backed, caught the first car, and tugged. The train started down the tracks, the men following, laughing and singing.

The working platform in the heading was brightly illuminated, and over it hung a large wooden sign edged with dazzling red, white and blue electric lights.

"Welcome West!" it said.

Shocker added a line in chalk.

"Welcome to the Sidewalks of New York."

After east met west, it would be but a few days until the sand hogs would not be needed in the tunnel. They'd drift, wherever they might, wherever another tunnel was making, wherever a wide river needed men to build a path beneath it.

Ringer's gang greeted Shocker's with shouts and jovial curses.

"You're the luckiest beggar in town," Ringer said, "gettin' the honor of holing through. How do you rate that stuff, when you ain't been a heading boss long enough to get a headache?"

"Good work," Shocker said modestly. "That's the answer, Ringer. My gang run rings around yours and every other gang this side the river. We made more tunnel than any gang on either side, in our time. Naturally we hole through."

Ringer's men stayed to help in placing the pipe. They hoisted it from the flat cars by means of a chain block hanging from a bolt hole above, placed it on the platform, and guided the cutting end into the center pocket of the shield. Next they rolled a hydraulic jack behind it, then placed heavy timbers across the heading, wedging the jack into place.

"Let 'er go," Shocker ordered.

The piston of the jack moved forward, jamming the pipe into the last barrier between the rival gangs.

RINGER rallied his men with the cry, "Dry boots," shook hands with Shocker, wished him luck, and took his departure. Shocker stepped to the phone, was connected with the tunnel in the west, and got Nipper Moran on the wire.

"Nipper Moran?" he asked. "This is Jumbo. If you'll come through the pipe, and meet me, you heel, I'll tear you apart."

He hung up, and called the general superintendent.

"Mr. Breck? Shocker Duggan. We

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are ready for you now. But you'd better come right away or it'll be too late to see the fun."

The pipe was going farther and farther into the sand.

Shocker handed the phone to Frenchy.

"Get the west side on there," he said, "and hold him. Let me know the minute Moran starts into that pipe."

The hydraulic men were resetting the jack. Mulroy stood waiting to open the spindle that would drive the pipe the last few inches.

"Save it," Shocker yelled. "Breck's coming down with a gang. I don't want him to miss this."

The men took advantage of the delay, passing pint bottles around, singing, plunking on the banjos. Two of the iron-men danced together. Frenchy moved his body in tune to the music, writhing like an oriental dancer and rolling his eyes. Holing through is always a rough-house carnival for the sand hogs.

Shocker went up tunnel to meet the superintendent's party, which included the contractors, some of the lesser superintendents, a celebrated artist, a banker, an explorer, a few of the city's officials, and a number of newspaper people. There were two women in the group. Shocker looked at them, then looked away. He'd been looking at girls that way for weeks.

Mr. Breck greeted Shocker cordially and introduced his friends.

"First time most of them ever went into high air," he said. "And they did pretty well. Even the girls made it without trouble. Well, it's a new world, Shocker. Women can do 'most anything a man can these days, especially newspaper women. You've got to hand it to them. They fly planes. They go in for deep sea diving. And they go down into high air as though it were —say—moonshine."

Shocker saw a tiny smear of blood under the explorer's nose.

"Of course," the superintendent added, "some of our party had to give up."

"There are two kinds of people," Shocker observed, "those who can eat high air, and those who can't. Sometimes even the veteran sand hogs can't take it."

Peering over Mr. Breck's shoulder, Shocker saw Jumbo hobbling out of the lock. He signaled him to come on.

Shocker escorted the party to the heading, explaining to them what they were to see. He was surprised to find himself speaking readily, confidently, as though he were used to making speeches.

"And all these months, these two tunnels have been crawling through the primeval slime and sand and rock beneath the river, making each a path in the darkness. Now you're going to see those paths join each other and become one tunnel. And you'll note that the lines of the east tunnel will meet those of the west within three-sixteenths of an inch."

"That's accuracy, Professor," the explorer said. Shocker laughed. Nobody had ever called him that before.

"It's a rather delicate operation, this holing-through," he went on. "First we force a pipe through six feet of sand, all that remains between us and the other side. A man goes through that pipe. Two start, but only one goes through. They fight when they get to the center—they fight bitterly. Usually someone is hurt. Usually? There's never been a holing-through yet that didn't send one or more to a hospital.

"There isn't any rivalry on the earth, or above it, so keen as that which

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exists down here, not only between our own gangs, but between East Side and West. That rivalry must find its climax inside the pipe in the holing-through. The man first through that pipe wins victory for his side. And as he goes through that pipe, you'll see why he's called a sand hog."

"The holing-through ends your work, Professor?"

"Pretty nearly. All that remains is to shove the two shields together. A sheeting of poling boards will be inserted around the outer sides of the two hoods, forming a temporary protection against the river. We're directly underneath the river here, about one hundred feet from its surface. The hoods will be burned out with torches. The main sections of the shield will be shoved once more, and the diaphragms will be burned away, leaving only the skins. These two hollow steel cylinders, their forward ends flush and touching, will then be reinforced with rings of iron. When the erector swings the last plates into place, the tunnel will be complete except for the final concrete lining."

"But, Professor," one of the reporters objected, "three-sixteenths of an inch! Is that possible?" He suddenly recognized Shocker. "Good night!" he cried. "That's one for the book. I know you. And me calling you 'Professor'! Say that's rich. You're Shocker Duggan, the fellow that knocked out Kid Hanley with a single punch. In the Everglades."

SEVERAL others then recognized him. They had written much about him, after the Everglades incident. They had filled the papers with pictures of him. He had been front page stuff for awhile—and for awhile had been totally forgotten.

Immediately the photographers moved into action, but Shocker begged off. "Not now," he said. "We haven't any time. Wait until we go through—and you can take all the pictures you want."

He ushered the party forward, one of the women walking by his side—the pretty one without the glasses. He helped them to the platform, and turned to Mulroy.

"Let 'er go," he said.

The piston pressed forward against the rear end of the pipe, advancing it thirty inches. The jack was telescoped back into its cylinder, and the bracing timbers were moved forward. The jack was reset, and the pressure once more applied.

"She's t'rough," Frenchy screamed suddenly. "De pipe t'rough, Boss. An' Nippe' Moran's goin' in."

Shocker started across the platform, where the huge head of Jumbo had just made its appearance. He bent down and grasped Jumbo's hands. The long body came up, like a log hauled out of the water, and the photographers shot from every angle.

Jumbo limped across the short space, tearing off his vest, breaking his tie in two, ripping off his collar, throwing away his new hat and his cane. His eyes were fixed with painful intensity on the pipe, packed tight with the sand it had swallowed. Mr. Breck turned away his head, diplomatically.

Jumbo pitched forward and began burrowing into the pipe, scooping the sand up with his hands, hurling it out on either side of him. His head and shoulders disappeared, then his serge hind quarters, then the soles of his shoes. The sand came out in spurts. The sand hogs whooped and yelled as they cleared it away from the pocket, and urged their champion on.

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Inch by inch Jumbo rooted his way ahead. His face was in the sand, and the sand was in his eyes, his nose, his ears, his mouth, his clothes. His fingere were skinned and cut. The cuts were filled with sand. His nails were ripped off, worn off. Sand was under them. He dug ahead.

Shocker went in when he could, half-smothered and half-blinded by the hail of sand that Jumbo threw. He, too, dug with his hands. Jumbo's one good foot threshed about wildly, seeking support. It struck Shocker's face, ground his lip against his teeth. Shocker didn't know it. The shoe was covered with wet sand. Shocker's mouth was filled with sand. He didn't know that either.

"Go on, Jumbo," he cried. "I'll be your legs."

Jumbo, tearing at the wall of sand, felt his fingers close on a shock of hair. He used it as a lever to drag himself nearer. Shocker, feeling him go, shoved himself ahead. Back of him now, Proud Foot offered his shoulders as a rest for Shocker's feet.

Light filtered into the cramped cylinder; and the two enemies recognized each other, and roared with anger and joy, and swung short hooked punches at each other. Both snarled and spat, and kept on punching. Both loved this sort of thing, wished for it, lived for it.

Moran tried to gouge out Jumbo's eyes. Jumbo caught Moran's throat in his left hand, and crashed a right to the jaw. Moran freed his throat and bit Jumbo's left hand until he tasted blood. Jumbo roared with pain and rage, hunched forward, and wrapped his arms about the thick chest, in a grip strong enough to crush a rib. Moran struggled; but could not get out of that vise-like hug.

"I swore I'd break you, Moran," Jumbo said. "Now—I'll keep my word."

Moran's arms were pinioned to his sides. He was going backward, backward, ever backward. He was losing strength. He was suddenly afraid. He screamed. Jumbo relaxed his grip. He couldn't break a man who screamed. He smashed twice at Moran's face, and pushed with his open hand. The limp body went backward—despite all the men behind it could do.

It fell suddenly out of the west end of the pipe, and lay where it fell, while Jumbo crawled through the tube, and wiped his gritty blood-smeared face.

"We win," he roared. "We holed the job through. Me, Jumbo. I holed it through."

SHOCKER crawled through in time to keep him from falling. Proud Foot followed, and Mulroy, and all the Queensborough gang. Every one congratulated Jumbo, even the losing west-enders. They shook hands with Jumbo, and pounded him on the back before they attended to their fallen champion, offered him their flasks.

Moran was placed on a flat car and sped toward the locks and the shaft and the waiting ambulance in Manhattan.

There's always an ambulance waiting at each end of the tunnel when the sand hogs are holing-through.

Mulroy, when he could, drew Jumbo and Shocker to him.

"I got an idea," he said. "But we ain't got much time. Those newspaper guys can't hang around all day. Not in this air. Come on, let's go back before they get away. Shocker and I will stage a duel. I'll knock you on the head with my wrench, Shocker. Jumbo'll carry you to the ambulance. And—"

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"No," Jumbo said. "I'll hit him. You can't hit hard enough."

"A Stillson wrench hits plenty hard," Mulroy insisted.

Shocker shook his head. "So this is what writing plays does to a guy," he said. "What's the idea? Publicity for your play? You're crazy."

But suddenly his eyes brightened, and he caught Mulroy to him.

"Lee," he said. "What a pal! She'll read the story and come looking for me in the fractured-skull ward. Is that the plot?"

"In two acts. I kiss you with the wrench. Curtain."

"Curtains, you mean. Not curtain."

"Lee shows up. Another curtain."

"I got a better idea," Shocker said. "One that won't put you in jail, either —nor get Jumbo stopped from his boat ride. I know how much you'd like to see me in the hospital, lard-head. But you don't want to stick around and be a witness. Do you? All right. We'll tell the newspapers that Jumbo—the paralyzed hero of the holing-through —is sailing to-night. With his bride. And that I'm sailing with them. If Lee reads that, she'll be at the dock when the boat sails! If she reads it."

"Swell!" Mulroy said. "The captain can marry them too. To make your story good."

Jumbo looked suddenly startled. He grabbed his forelock. He looked around for his cane, and remembered he threw it away.

"Let me out of here," he bellowed. "Let me out of here quick. Amy'll give me hell. She sure will give me hell."

THE Hog Hole was crowded when Shocker, dressed in a neat blue suit, stepped into it for the last time. Drinks were on the house. Every man was his own bartender. Limey was drunk and bubbling over with happiness.

"I give you the bride, Shocker," he called, lifting a whisky bottle. "A grycious bride. Miss Imey."

"She's married, Limey?"

"Sure she's married, Shocker. Or she will be in arf a mo. Jumbo 'e was lyte, 'e was.

"Stormed in 'ere like a cryzy man. 'Ollering it was 'im 'oled through. Miss Imy'll 'ole 'im through for that, she will."

"Give me a bottle of Scotch, Limey."

He took the bottle and went out. He could not see Jumbo married. A friend married was a friend lost. He left the barroom and walked down the street outside, the street that pitched to the river.

It was warm on the pier. And it was quiet. He sat on the parapet and drank and smoked, and harried his mind with thoughts.

It was over. It would never be again. The tunnel was finished. Youth was finished. All the care-free days. All the care-free companions.

He threw a cigarette into the stream and watched it idly until it vanished. He had drifted with the stream like that dead butt, he mused.

But that was over. Now he was old, and empty, and tired. And only one thing mattered. He must find Lee. There was faint hope that she would be at the pier to-night. She didn't usually buy newspapers. She might not read the story. And even if she did—she might not come to see the ship depart.

He finished the bottle and threw it into the river. It bobbed up and down on the oily surface, glinting in the sun, half submerged.

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He was done with whisky, too. You didn't need whisky, building bridges. You needed whisky only when you ate high air.

He started back toward the Hog Hole when darkness came, and the first stars. But he did not go in. The crowd was still there, boisterous with drink. They were probably wrecking the place.

Amy and Jumbo would be packing their last suitcase, sending off trunks, auctioning off the furniture and the dishes. Or were they shipping all their household junk?

Amy and Jumbo would be busy. He would be in the way. No, that was a lie. He was never in their way. He just didn't want to say good-by to them. He'd see them on the ship. They'd be standing against the rail, and he'd wave to them from the pier. He climbed into a taxi and went to a restaurant.

He dined alone, eating little, drinking nothing but water. After dinner he walked the streets, looking at women, and looking away.

The boat was scheduled to sail at midnight, flood tide. He was on the dock at ten.

He walked the length of the dock shed. Below, where overalled and shirt-sleeved men sweated and shouted as they trucked barrels and cases and bales, where little cars ran on narrow gage tracks—as they ran on the gantry top—bringing stores into the reach of the vessel's derricks. Past and around bales of cotton and tobacco and crates of machinery and motors, stepping out of the path of pleasure-cars and trucks, sniffing a thousand smells, looking into shadows, seeing everything, seeing nothing.

And above. Past and around and through hordes of hurrying, excited, gabbling people, men and women who spoke in a hundred different tongues, porters wheeling hand trucks piled with label-covered luggage, white-coated stewards standing near the gangplanks, government officials, occasional policemen, ship's officers, passengers standing in line and moving slowly in front of a booth at which they exhibited their tickets and their passports.

He did not see her.

HE saw Amy and Jumbo arrive, with a crowd of sand hogs carrying their suitcases and cursing the porters who tried to take them. He stepped back into shadow, and watched as they went up the gangplank. They might be going up the gantry steps, so noisy and rough and blasphemous they were, so eager, so hilariously gay. Mulroy was with them, throwing rice at the laughing bride, and old shoes at the limping bridegroom. He carried the shoes in a basket. And he threw them with unerring aim.

Shocker did not call to them. He could not run to them. He walked about, for hours, it seemed to him, looking at women, looking away. He strolled out to the street, and came back again into the shed, looking through dirt-glazed windows and the open gangways at the people on the ship, happy, excited, well-dressed people lining the rails, calling, waving their hands, spitting into the river far below them.

He knew where Jumbo's cabin was. He heard Jumbo roaring. He heard other familiar voices—high and shrill they seemed, as they sounded in the tunnel. There must be a grand party in progress there. A hundred sand hogs or more, coming and going. And every man jack of them telling Jumbo he'd

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be in Samoa in a few weeks to help build the tunnel to Tahiti. The tunnel to Tahiti! A lie created out of loving kindness to save a sand hog's pride and to give him a new lease on life.

He could not distinguish what was said. But he knew. It was as though he were present.

"Here's to you, Jumbo. Here's to ye, b'y. Jumbo, your bleedin' health. We'll be wi' you, Jumbo mon. Bum voy-age! Here's how. Here's how!"

Amy would not be there. She'd be on deck somewhere, walking alone, looking at the stars or the lights. She had no women friends to see her off, to say good-by to her.

It was her honeymoon, but Jumbo's farewell party.

He grew frantic as the hour of departure neared; when the puffing little tugs made fast to the ocean greyhound, when her siren startled the night, when he heard the stewards crying, "All ashore."

He had not found her.

The last loads were put aboard. The gangplanks were hauled in, running over little rollers into the shed. Ropes were cast off. And the steamer began to go, stern first into the rippling Hudson River.

Shocker wiped his sweating face. He was perspiring freely. Yet he felt cold. He walked through crowds of peole again, shouting, hand-waving people, people he didn't know, people he knew too well—sand hogs shouting, "So long, Jumbo!" sand hogs cursing and fighting each other, sand hogs as drunk and full of fun as though it were a wake.

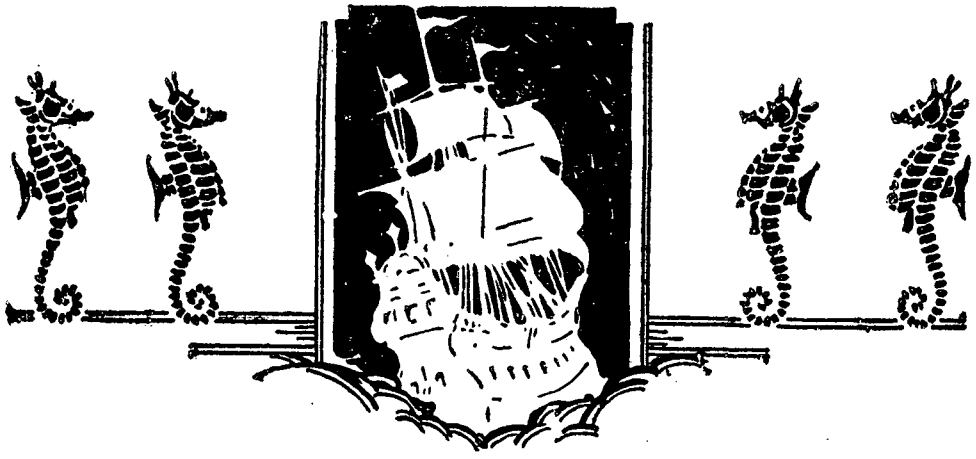
He walked to the far end, through a door, onto a tiny platform where the wind blew strong. He saw Jumbo, standing against the railing at the prow, and he saw Amy at his side. He waved to them, but did not shout.

The tugs were taking the liner fast to midstream where she would turn. It was all over. It was done. He watched the ship for a little time, a beautiful thing, a picture done in lights.

He turned to go. And she was coming through the doorway toward him, tear-stained, white, a slim girl in a gray dress and a gray fedora hat—coming to wave a last good-by to love.

He took her in his arms.

THE END.



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The Men Who Make The Argosy

JAMES STEVENS

Author of the Paul Bunyan stories, of "Rainbow Morning," etc.

SKETCHING my life is a job akin to unscrambling eggs, for the sum of my years is a marvelously mixed jumble of experiences.

I was born in a sleepy Iowa village in 1892, and lived there until my tenth year. Then chance shifted me to a rough and rowdy existence in the foothills of the Seven Devils Range in Idaho. My father was a dry-land rancher, and an uncle owned a small white pine sawmill. For five years I enjoyed the company of profane cow hands, loony sheep-herders, and fighting horse-loggers. I suffered little formal schooling.

At fifteen I shouldered a balloon (blanket roll) and started traveling in a side-door Pullman. The West was booming then, despite the panic of 1907, and from the government railroad in Alaska to the canal in Panama huge construction jobs were under way. During the next five years I worked and roved in all the States west of the Rockies. I skun the desert mule and learned a solid appreciation for this unsung hero of the great open spaces. I have jerk-lined mules on freight wagons and Stockton plows, walloped 'em four abreast on Fresno scrapers, in three-ups on Stroud dump wagons, packed with them in the sugar pine mountains of northern California. And I survived it all without a solitary mule scar! Even to-day, the imaginative and sardonic mule remains my favorite animal.

In 1914 I became a confirmed logger; and three years later I journeyed overseas with the 162nd Infantry, once the 3rd Oregon. My year and a half in France was placid, even dull. I was an automatic rifle instructor. The fact that I was the worst shot in the company did not bother me—or my superiors. My job was to talk.

When the war was over I stopped talking and returned to work in the woods. Six years later I began writing stories about Paul Bunyan, the legendary hero of the loggers; and I'm still making my living by the typewriter. My wife and I travel considerably, ranging around from the old Michigan pineries to the Oregon coast. In 1928 I went to the Argentine and the Amazon on a freighter, but the trip did not thrill me much. I don't like foreign parts; I like the Oregon Cascades, ham and eggs, brown-paper cigarettes—and mules.

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Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

WOULD rather have ARGOSY than a harp:

Colonia Dublan,
Chihuahua, Mexico.

I am sending you a one dollar bill for a three-month subscription to ARGOSY. That dollar was hard to capture and hold on to long enough to get it into a letter, but I must have the ARGOSY. I have been reading the magazine off and on—when I had the price—ever since it was a boys' magazine in a green cover, with a picture of the good old galleon on it. That must have been 'way back in 1880-1-2.

Then I read it in the Philippine Islands, when I was a soldier during the Philippine insurrection, and after. I think it subsequently changed title to *Argosy-Allstory*. Still later, I read it in China, and by that time it was *Allstory Weekly*. But it always contained the best of stories, and kept up to standard.

Now I'm sixty-two years old, and am reading it down in old Mexico.—I'm afraid it's too much to hope that when I'm dead I'll still be able to get ARGOSY. I'd rather have it than a harp, at that!

Unlike some of your readers, I can't see anything at all the matter with the magazine, and you'll admit I've read it over a good many years. It suits *me* perfectly. May your shadow never grow less.

JOHN H. FOWLER.

"RIPPING" to a Bahaman:

Nassau N. P., Bahamas.

I believe that the ARGOSY is used by every person who reads good books or magazines. Even the residents of tiny Nassau in the Bahamas get their share—and I mine.

While "spring cleaning" about four years ago, I picked up a dirty, coverless magazine to throw away. Out of curiosity I opened it, and ever since then I have been reading the ARGOSY.

The first copy was good and every other one that I have seen was equally good. Paul Stahr is an excellent cover designer; whenever he does the cover work the magazine is good—but especially so the story that the picture illustrates. W. C. Tuttle, Bill Adams and W. McL. Raine are positively ripping as writers. The others are good, but often they let the heroes do too many wonderful things without getting harmed. This is sickening, because no human being can do those things and get off as lightly as their heroes do.

The story called "Picture Rock" is the sort of story I like, because the hero nearly lost. You have no idea how I enjoyed that story, solely because it was as it was.

FREEMAN SMITH.

WANTS sad endings:

Silver City, N. M.

For the past four years I have been a most ardent reader of your magazine, the ARGOSY. During this time I have missed but three editions of it.

Two stories in your September 22 issue cause me to write to you. The first, "Shula Set," by Jay Lucas; the second, "Kingdom of the Lost," by Loring Brent. For years I have been reading stories and seeing movies in which the outcome is always the same; i. e., at the end the heroine and the hero kiss and live happily ever after. But in "Shula Set" the outcome of the fight is not known until *Shula's* return. This ending came very near to what I have been waiting for, though not quite. Again the hero recovers and the heroine marries the boy!

In "Kingdom of the Lost" the outcome is magnificent. In many ways it is true to life; one or the other of the leads perishes, leaving the other to live a life of sorrow and remorse. Very few are the stories or movies that dare to use this ending. Very few are the authors who are willing to give to the public this realistic but infinitely sadder ending.

Let me congratulate your magazine for having printed this story, and may Loring Brent and Jay Lucas write more stories with this type of ending.

RAY STEYSKAL.

THE Legend of Ys:

Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

By an interesting coincidence, I laid down the current ARGOSY to-night and picked up a book on the *châteaux* of France. What should I find

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but the legend of the drowned city of Ys (here called Is) with the golden key to the city gates, the wicked Dahut and all. The local version differs somewhat from Mr. Merritt's excellent story, "Creep, Shadow!" in that the hero was not a native Breton, but a Norseman who opened the gates to avenge the murder of his brother, one of the Dahut's lovers. He was unable to escape, and perished, along with the wicked Dahut and her Druid magician. The legend further states that the lost city, after being purified by the waves, was raised by the local saint and was turned into a monastery which remains to-day as the City of Mont St. Michel.

Of course there may be other versions of this legend. Mr. Merritt may have used one, or perhaps even made one up himself. But it was interesting to run across a confirmation of its source.

F. P. CRAGIN.

A MANHATTAN adventurer:

THE ADVENTURER

I've roamed o'er every continent,
I've sailed the seven seas.
I've slept in a gaudy Arab tent,
And in hellholes of disease.

From Timbuctoo to Singapore,
From Greenland to Peru,
My feet know ev'ry foreign shore—
My eyes know ev'ry view.

I've seen the tiger in his lair,
And caught the mighty whale.
I've trod where angels never dare—
And lived to tell the tale!

I've scaled the ice-capped Everest,
And combed the ocean bed.
I've even sat upon the crest
Of the Silent Desert Head!

I've skied the slopes of Switzerland,
Fished in the Caribbean,
Traded furs at Samarkand,
And prayed in Palestine.

My years now total three score nine,
I've settled down to reverie—
To read and live and match with mine
The thrills I find in ARGOSY.

HENRY GERSHWIN,
N. Y. City.

LOOKING AHEAD!

Blood on the Moon

To Fat Deckler, whose reputation had always sought the shadows, a yacht in the Caribbean seemed the ideal spot from which to kidnap an heiress.—Later, he wondered how he could have been so dumb.—A swift novelette by

Eustace L. Adams

Riders of the Night

What happens when a dangerous crook lets down for a few moments' fun on a merry-go-round

A Short Story by Theodore Roscoe

West Coast Spoils

Fleeing from the West African Constabulary, a white man finds he has taken refuge aboard a hell ship bound for jungle disaster. A novel by

F. V. W. Mason

Razorback

Everybody wanted him, nobody would claim him, yet they all fought over him—that damned nuisance of a razorback hawg in Southern mountains. A novelette by

Raymond S. Spears

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—NOVEMBER 10

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